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THE PILGRIM OF A SMILE

BY

NORMAN DAVEY

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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TO JACK SEYMOUR YULE WITHOUT
WHOSE SYMPATHY AND BELIEF THIS
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"Ce n'est pas de ma faute si les âmes, dont on arrache les voiles et qu'on montre à nu, exhalent une si forte odeur de pourriture."

—Octave Mirbeau.

"You must not expect grapes from a thistle. I am old and a cynic . . . I am a carrion crow; but it is not my fault, after all, that the world is such a nauseous kennel."

—Prince Otto.

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BOOK I: PETITION

THE PILGRIM OF A SMILE

CHAPTER I: THE FIRST CONGREGATION

THE Curio club, as all the world knows, overlooks the Thames. From its upper windows one may look down upon the swirl of discoloured water hurrying to the sea. To the right, spanning the river like a rusty iron bar thrown across a ditch, loom the girders of the railway bridge of Charing Cross. Opposite, across the river, a factory chimney climbs into the upper air from out of the disorder of wharves and cranes, merchandise and mean houses, which flank the mud-banks on the Surrey side. Immediately below, where once the gardens of the Adelphi fell away to the watermen's steps, lies the Embankment, bearing in its broad sweep a myriad vehicles, and noisy, even at the end of night, with the clangour of County Council trams. The Embankment itself, with its burden of traffic, is hidden from view by the green tops of trees, but above these, to the left, rises a slender needle or obelisk of grey stone, known to all Londoners under the name of her, whom age could not wither: whose infinite variety custom could not stale. At the foot of this column, one may see—if one is curious enough to leave the comfort and good company of the club for the common street—two figures, half woman and half beast, patient and immobile, asleep and dreaming for all time, it may be supposed, upon the beauty of Cleopatra.

It is not, however, to its position alone—nor even to the decorative skill of the Adam brothers—that the Curio

club owes its peculiar reputation. It is in the quality of its membership, in the character of its members and in the temper of its society that the Curio club is so renowned: it is in this constitution that its guests are so admirably entertained: it is of this cause that its waiting list is so long.

To be a Curio—to use the quaint phraseology of the club—one must be curious: one must be eccentric: distinguishable, if not distinguished: egregious: out of the common herd. One must have done something, said something, seen something, made something, been somewhere, or even simply be something to qualify for membership. In a club such as this, of a character so catholic and yet so particular, it is inevitable that now and again members are admitted on slight and accidental qualifications. Harry McLean, the well-known actor, was scarcely eligible at the time of his admission, and, indeed, only secured election by the happy accident of being cited as co-respondent in two different divorce cases simultaneously. Major Bunter undoubtedly owed his election to his having ended an argument by unscrewing his wooden leg and knocking over his proposer with it when he was a guest at a club dinner: and there is little doubt that Canon Fairfax owed his to his having refreshed himself with a stiff whiskey and soda in the middle of delivering a stirring address on total abstinence.

Yet it is precisely this accidentalism—if I may use the word—that gives to the Curio club that flavour of the unexpected which is hardly to be found in any other club in London. A club made up only of those who had attained real prominence and a name in the world, might, and indeed would, be a very dull place indeed. There is no disease so insidious as notoriety—no fever so enervating as success.

I hope I shall not be thought to libel many excellent and able men when I say that the centre of social activity in the Curio club is the bar—for the bar in the Curio club is more than simply a place of by-drinkings—it is a

symbol: and to enter and to leave not without some comforting of man's spirit, is a ceremony, and at all times a duty, in the Curious.

On a certain night in early summer, not long after the war, this bar of the Curio club had been, perhaps, more than usually attended: throughout the evening a stream of members passed in and out of the small, square, panelled room, and from time to time as those incoming exceeded in number those outgoing, a small dark cluster of humanity clung to the bar rail like bees swarming on a sunny wall.

Many men, whose names, if not known to all, are at least familiar to the informed, had passed in and drunk and talked a little and passed out. Ganniman—the famous war correspondent—had come in, arriving that day from the storm centre of Central Russia, and his tales of hunger and pestilence and rape and murder and persecutions, had entertained many present, until little Ackerman, the socialist sculptor from Stepney, had called him a liar; and the angry pressman had been led out (after paying for a broken glass) by Billy Jamieson and Sir Stanley Farr.

Sir Stanley, earlier in the evening, had been reminiscent of excavations and escapes: impressively, in that booming voice that is so well known on the lecture platform, he told the story of how at midnight in the half-dug-up theatre of Marcus Callipolus he had talked with a wandering and unhappy spirit that had trailed its ghostly toga up and down over where had been the stage.

"I questioned him meticulously," Sir Stanley had said —"of how they dressed and lived—of minor things, impossible often for the archæologist even to surmise—and particularly of what they ate and what they drank . . ."

Robert Marshall—the notorious manager of half-a-dozen "halls"—laughed loudly, throwing his huge bulk back in his chair and tossing off the remainder of a bottle of Duminy with an impudent gesture towards Sir Stanley.

"Ha, ha, ha! And what did your bally ghost say to that, Farr? What did the old johnnie drink?"

"He said—' 'Arf-and-'arf—when I can pay for it—I'm an actor—not a bloody manager!' . . ."

Then there was Penhaligon. He had not been in the club for eighteen months, and three fingers of his right hand were still in Nova Zembla. He seemed thinner than ever and looked tired: he said that three days had made him weary of civilisation. He drank some brandy, holding the glass delicately between his thumb and little finger. His long, gaunt frame towered over the group about the bar, and his lean face was hardly less grave for that sardonic smile which had been the terror of many savage folk. Someone asked about his hand, and Penhaligon told the story in short staccato sentences.

"It's a damned nuisance," ended Penhaligon, "bein' the right hand; and as the only surgical apparatus available was a broken penknife and two sticks, it's not finished off as nice and pretty as it might be . . . but still the little finger works well and is learning to do the work of three."

"Look here, Penhaligon," said Sir Junius Klien, pushing his way across the room to his friend—"it's time you had a real rest: come down to my place in Gloucestershire. You can have the whole house to yourself—and a good mount—and some quite passable fishing for England. Come down for a month—or two for that matter: what you need is absolute quiet—ask any doctor—ask Bunny here: aren't I right, Bunny?"

Sir James Bunnythorne had tact and a discerning sympathy for a suffering and a bewildered humanity: he had not stood at the bedside of noble and royal sufferers had he not held a consolation even in his voice: but his bedside manner, it may be believed, was reserved for these: his honesty was the prerogative of the Curious.

"I am in agreement with you, Junius," he said slowly, "when you say that Penhaligon needs quiet: but the quiet that he needs he will not find in Gloucestershire. The only

locality where the quiet that he seeks may be found—if we are to believe the pundits—is further away than Gloucestershire."

"So the pill costs nothing? It is an hundred guineas for the gilding? Eh, Bunny?" and Penhaligon looked more sardonic than ever.

"If I am to prescribe," continued Sir James, evenly, "another brandy and soda—George, two brandies and sodas. . . ."

"But fill me with the old familiar juice . . ." chanted some one from the far corner, and a thin, piping voice completed the verse:—

"'I sure shall be discovered by and by,' that's the latest gag in Noo York since the thirsty first—don't you know: darned neat, I call it—what . . . ?"

But Penhaligon had drunk his brandy hurriedly and was passing out. Sir Junius followed him out on to the landing. Above them both hung shields of hide and arrows tipped with swift vegetable poisons, tom-toms and tall spears—devilish and savage things. The noise and chatter of the bar sounded faintly behind them.

"You'd much better come down, said Sir Junius—"for a week, anyway."

Penhaligon shook his head.

"I can't, old man: fact, I'm off to Uruguay the day after to-morrow."

"Good God!" cried Klien, "hasn't even Nova Zembla sickened you for a while of your wanderlust? What are you always seeking? Cannot you stay here in peace for a little while?"

"Old friend," began Penhaligon, "I seek nothing. I wander not to find, but to lose."

"To lose what?"

Penhaligon laid a hand on Sir Junius's shoulder.

"You may have seen, if you are observant, a practice that certain small boys have in this city, of tying a tin full of pebbles to a dog's tail. The faster the dog runs, the louder rattle the stones in the tin, but the dog cannot

escape from this torment, for the tin is tied to his tail with a string; and where he goes, so goes this tumult with him."

Penhaligon paused.

"God," he said, thoughtfully, "I think of myself as one of those small boys. I am the dog—with a tin full of pebbles tied to my tail."

"And the tin full of stones?" asked Sir Junius.

"Is myself," said Penhaligon, turning to go down.

"What are you two whispering about?" broke in a boyish voice from the bar-room. "Tell uncle the joke too!"

"Penhaligon," said Sir Junius, soberly, "was telling me a funny story."

"About a dog," added Penhaligon, half-way down the stairs.

Charlie Allardyce came into the club as Penhaligon was going out—and he, too, drifted into the bar.

"See Penhaligon smile?" he asked of nobody in particular (and in a parenthesis—"George—a large whiskey and splash"). "Makes a fellow feel quite ill—'and his eyelids are a little weary,' you know (George—when *is* that whiskey coming along?). If I knew as much as *he* knows I'd stop writin' novels . . ."

"Which would be a damned good thing for the public and a damned bad thing for your publishers," broke in a thin young man in a pair of gold pince-nez.

"What, Jimmy, rejected again—hope deferred and the heart sick, eh? Come and have a drink with me—you'll write a good tale some day when you're drunk—'But fill me with the old . . .'"

"Don't Charles! Don't," interrupted the thin man, a little wildly, "it's been quoted four times in this bar already this evening; and three times wrongly."

"All right—I know it's hackneyed—I'm not a high-brow like you. I earn my living by being epigrammatic and original and all that on paper" (dumb expostulation from the thin man); "you can't expect me to be clever and scintillating in a bar. Besides, I've spent all the

afternoon trying to prevent a fool from committing suicide (why I should try to stop so eminently sane an undertaking, God knows), and I'm going to spend the rest of the evening getting drunk."

"Who's that wants to pop off?" asked O'Gorman, the film actor.

"Popoff?" hiccoughed a rotund little man who should have been on the boards at this hour had he not been, as he had told everybody earlier in the evening, "on the rocks." "Popoff? No (hic) damned Russian in this club. I'm on the committee. Whatjermean, Charles—bringing (hic) bloody Bolshevik called Tchokof in (hic) club? Kick him downstairs (hic)—so much for Kickoff!" —and the little man, after having made a futile assault upon the only member in the bar whose face he did not know, left the club supported by two friends and the sense of an unpleasant duty performed.

The bar had already become visibly less crowded. Sometimes singly—sometimes in a small crowd of three or four—members dropped away; a few upstairs to the card-rooms, but the many out into the night and to their own habitations. Hour, place and circumstance may stand sponsor for the stories that were still told, and the interminable reminiscences of Haddam, that doyen of agents, each prefaced with the words "I knew her when . . .", must be left unchronicled in this uncomic history.

At last four men only still stood by the bar. One of them was sober.

None of these three men who were not sober had yet reached that prominence and notoriety that is usually associated with members of the Curio club. They were all young men who had passed scrutiny with the committee more on account of peculiarities and strange intentions—in two cases on account of an early achievement—rather than from a reputation and an acceptance of things done.

Moxon, the poet, was unknown to the general: indeed his name was hardly familiar to the critical. He was

tall, thin and clean-shaven: meticulously dressed in a grey tweed suit, a high starched collar and a sombre black and grey tie. His forehead was high, his features alert and his expression a little hard.

He looked as though he might be employed in the city; and would have bred confidence in clients as an outside broker. In point of fact, he so far corroborated his appearance as being the only contributor to the *Red Review* who had ever won payment for his poems from that enterprising periodical. Except for verse in this review, occasional poems in a few of the less-known and esoteric journals, and a thin volume of fugitive pieces published at a loss by an obscure and provincial speculator, the bulk of his production lay neatly typed in quarto in the drawers of his desk. A considerable income had accrued to him on the death of his father, late of the shipping firm of Dekker, Moxon and Dekker, and the young man was enabled to pursue his avocation without thought for the morrow or any care to conform to the taste of the vulgar.

It might be thought that a young man so fortunately placed, with receipts that annually totted up to four figures, of a temper to enjoy all that this so base coin could provide and of a mind to conserve rather a lasting happiness than half-day pleasures, should not at any time, except as a sentimental exercise, be melancholy upon this earth. Yet of the three unhappy men who still drank at the bar of the Curio club that night Geoffrey Moxon was the most unhappy.

There was Peter Connington, well known as an illustrator to the readers of the less reputable weeklies and a few of the monthly magazines. Peter and his wife found it necessary to live, and though the attic in their small house at Chiswick was filled with canvasses, it was rarely one of these that appeared as assets against the tradesmen's bills. Ten years ago, Peter had been full of hope, and had worked with hardly a thought of time while daylight lasted: and if he still worked as hard to-day, the hope that remained in his heart had sunk to a flicker:

a flame so insecure that any sharp and sudden draught of ill-fortune might blow it out altogether. If he still wore a velvet coat and a black cascade of a tie (as he did to-night) it was a habit of an expectation that was moribund and as a remainder of a never-to-be-forgotten apprenticeship in the arts. His long fair hair swept backwards like a mane and hung deep upon the dark collar of his coat: his heavy moustache was ragged and untrimmed, and he had not shaved that morning—nor, it must be confessed, the morning before that. Yvonne had, however, grown used to his unshavings, and indeed would have loved him equally well semi-hirsute or bearded as the pard, for if he was unhappy in the practice of his art he was most happy and to be envied of many in his wife.

He drank sullenly, frowning at the tumbler he held in his hand, as though suspicious of the quality of the liquor. He paid no heed to the inanities of O'Donoghue, who had been talking for some time in spite of the apathy of his audience.

"Gottit across," he was saying, in a thin voice, with but a trace of a brogue. "And it knocked 'em: man, I saw it—*you* know—felt it go through 'em—I—I heard 'em *flutter:* best gag I've ever done: an' I've done some. It came to me while I was standing in the wings waiting for the Dook to give me my cue. I knew it would get 'em—and it got 'em: don't I know when it's across? And what does that one-spot sheeny, Mr. Shellback Oppenheim say to me? 'It's not in the book,' he says, looking through me as if I was a plate-glass window, 'it's not in the book,' he says, 'and if you interpolate agin, you'll get the bird!' 'Interpolate!' Oh, Gawd!—and give me the bird—*me!* And I meet him in this bar, I'll put it across his high Hebrew nose and he owns all the halls in Christendom. Aren't I a faithful son of the Church? and I not to hit a filthy Hebrew who gives me the bird. There's not a reverend father, I'm thinking, in all the world, but will be glad. . . ."

"Oh, shut it," said Connington, wearily. "If you're no

funnier on the boards than you are off 'em, I don't wonder old Shellback . . ."

"George," cried O'Donoghue, "give me another of the same. Even me friends turn against me for a tall rascal . . ."

"I think it was not only wicked, but foolish of him, to say that," began a small, very precise voice. "Of course, we have not heard the gag—'gag' you call it, don't you?—but I am quite sure . . ."

"Dear old Sumner—always his kind old self," broke in O'Donoghue.

Matthew Sumner was a small man, of an insignificant appearance. In the Curio club, where every member almost signifies something—if it be no more than fealty to Bacchus or a belief in Bohemia—this insignificance of Sumner was something to remark. In a club in which the affairs of other people were everybody's business, and the common reserve of Englishmen was pilloried as snobbery, few members even knew the name of this little man with the beard—and none—not even Joseph Kellerman, that collector of personalia and club chronicler-in-chief, knew who he was and what was his occupation, or why he was a member of this peculiar club.

He might have been, and indeed was, not more than thirty-five years of age, but the short, dark beard that he wore made him look several years older. He wore a sombre suit of dark grey—almost black—cloth, and a low butterfly collar with a small, neatly-tied black bow-tie. His shoes were black: somewhat unusually square at the toe; and his black socks were innocent of clocks. Once Kellerman had questioned him in a corner as to his trade: Matthew Sumner had replied in his slightly hesitating voice, which was hardly a stutter, that he was an agent. Even the known curiosity of the chronicler failed to achieve any further revelation: common politeness forbade inquiry beyond this: and when, on a later occasion, a drunken and curious gentleman had asked, "an agent in what?" the reply given had been, "an agent *in posse*":

it was the only epigram that little Matthew Sumner had ever been known to make.

Sumner was not commonly to be found in the bar. His presence in the bar-room this evening was as hard to explain as his being a member of the club at all. He had drunk a small glass of sherry early in the evening, and since then he had sat in an obscure corner in company with a large bottle of Vichy water. Neither had he come there to talk, for the words that he had said to O'Donoghue had broken a two-hour silence. It may be imagined that he was there to listen and to suck a little noisily at a foul briar pipe: though even this may have been a large assumption, it being more easily understood that Sumner was there by an odd chance and because he lacked enterprise to be elsewhere.

At last, the three companions left the club and walked out on to Adelphi Terrace. Matthew Sumner followed them. The night was very mild and dark. A heavy curtain of cloud hid from sight such stars as could have been seen from this segment of earth and at that season: and the moon at the moment was silvering antipodean seas. Street lamps and a few still-lighted windows—these, the remainder traffic and an advertisement for whiskey—were the only luminaries. Geoffrey Moxon strode across the roadway, and, seizing with his two hands the iron railing of the Terrace, declaimed into the darkness:—

> " 'And little credit find they with the light
> When through the morning window streams the sun:
> I fear me 'tis on water that they write.
> On soda-water epics have been done
> More lasting than the lyrics over-night.' "

But Connington broke into his periods with a question. "Where shall we go next?"

"All the bars will be closed by now—in this Merrie England," said O'Donoghue, savagely.

Geoffrey released the railings and swinging round faced his friends. Balancing himself with no small skill on the

iron guard rail that guards the outer curb, he addressed his hearers with preposterous solemnity.

"O sons of men, and for a time dwellers on this ponderable orb" ("You're drunk," from O'Donoghue, "it is true we can no longer infuse into this base clay a divine flame with the aid of Ganymede, his cup: and the minutes have been numbered lest even such as you and I drink and become as gods ere the day break. Because of these limitations and decrees, allocations and orders in council, there are here four men made in the image of God standing in this high place in Babylon: stayed, as it were, in mid-translation: a little lonely in the dark ways of night: questioning, one with another, 'whither shall we go?' And each, gazing into the face of his companion, finds there no answer. But I, the ever-living poet, will answer you this question that you ask of me. . . ."

"How long does he go on before running down?" asked O'Donoghue.

"Till someone stops him," said Connington.

But the ever-living poet had already jumped down from his pulpit. Opposite these four men a taxicab had pulled up, dropping its fare at the door of the Curio club. Geoffrey Moxon already held the door of the cab open, while the late occupant was paying the driver his fare.

"In," he cried, "in—all of you"; and the painter and the play-actor were inside the cab whilst Matthew Sumner stood hesitating at the open door.

"I really must be going home," he began.

"Get in," cried Geoffrey, with a kind of wild hilarity. "You are with us to-night, little man: he who is not with us is against us. Whither we go, you shall go: and what we see, you shall see: what we hear, you shall hear also: you are, of us, usly: and to-night there are not three Musketeers: there are four!"

Geoffrey Moxon turned to the driver of the cab.

"Drive to Cleopatra's Needle," he cried, and jumping in, slammed the door to with a bang.

The river ran, we may consider, heedless of four men

in a taxicab: heedless of barges, lighters, the police patrol-boat and many ships: regardless of sky-signs and portents: unthinking of so many human endeavours ended in its muddy waters: not even staying in its swift hurry to look upon a sacred pillar of stone stolen out of Egypt and floated hither over the wide seas more than forty years ago.

Upon its left bank in the heavy darkness of this summer night four men stood beneath the obelisk. The taxicab had slipped, easily, into oblivion. The mass of Waterloo Bridge loomed dark and shapeless above the tide beyond, and in front of them at their feet crouched a bronze figure smiling into the shadows.

" 'And though in the bed of Cleopatra,' " quoted Geoffrey Moxon, " 'can hardly with any delight raise up the ghost of a rose.' This needle and these hieroglyphics . . ." he began, in the guide-book manner.

"Since we are here—and God alone knows why . . ." began O'Donoghue.

"Let us ask questions of the Sphinx," ended Connington.

"That wasn't what you were going to say," said Moxon to O'Donoghue. "I call it damned silly. Keep to Cleopatra, old boy . . . this obelisk . . ."

"Besides, perhaps the Sphinx might not like it," said an apologetic voice just behind Geoffrey Moxon.

Each of the three men started, so complete had been the self-effacement of Sumner. They all had forgotten that he had come here with them in a taxicab and had not yet gone away.

"The Sphinx may not like it," repeated Geoffrey Moxon, a note of wonder in his voice, "nevertheless, I am decided: it is thinkable that she won't like it: shouldn't like it myself, in her place—these mortal questionings. But never mind; let us ask!"

"What shall we ask?" said Peter Connington.

"We shall ask that which we desire," answered the poet.

"I call it a damned silly business," interrupted O'Donoghue, and Matthew Sumner murmured something about

catching a train on the Underground, which was unregarded, if heard at all, by the others.

At this hour and in this place there were few passers-by. The night was too dark to tempt any dreamer to the river-bank; and as statisticians have it that those who leave this earth of their own will choose most often the small hours of the morning, the inquisitors were not disturbed by any of these: or perhaps it is that the bridge-heads are more tempting to would-be suicides. Whoever had this place to patrol, we may suppose was busied at one end or the other of his beat: and if any citizen, hastening homewards, gave a thought to these four men, he passed by in the shadows on the other side, incurious as to the vagaries of drunken men in a city of many accidents and strange things.

In front of and a little below the face of the Sphinx stood Geoffrey Moxon: his hat had fallen off in the taxi-cab and was pawned on the morrow by the driver for the sum of five shillings. He stood bareheaded, his arms outstretched towards the image: a supplicant. His clean-shaven face, finely chiselled and Grecian in profile, seemed almost of a luminous pallor in that cloudy darkness. Up to a moment ago, he had been very drunk: and as poets are, as it were, by way of being alchemists, to transmute from dross of lead a little gold, and to extract a living essence from earthly elixirs, it may be that by now he was also a little mad. Three figures stood in the shadows behind him and waited on his words.

"O Sphinx," began the poet, slowly, in a clear voice, and with a very distinct articulation, "O Sphinx, who so many centuries ago leapt into the sea at the answer of the king of Thebes, we believe that thy spirit still liveth to imbue with its grace images made in thy likness. That our faith is but a candle-flame in a draughty corridor . . ."

The speaker broke off suddenly, and half-turning to his audience behind him, said in an ordinary tone:—

"I had almost forgotten . . . I am growing old. There is a ceremonial."

He turned again towards the Sphinx and, dropping his arms to his side, began quoting in a monotone, without any dropping of the voice at the end of the lines:—

" 'Or had you shameful secret quests and did you hurry to your home
Some Nereid coiled in amber foam with curious rock-crystal breasts?

'Or did you treading through the froth call to the brown Sidonian
For tidings of Leviathan, Leviathan or Behemoth?

. . . . . .

'Or did you while the earthen skiffs dropped down the grey Nilotic flats
At twilight and the flickering bats flew round the temple's triple glyphs

'Steal to the border of the bar and swim across the silent lake
And slink into the vault and make the Pyramid your lupanar?

'Till from each black sarcophagus rose up the painted swathèd dead?
Or did you lure into your bed the ivory-horned Tragelaphos?

'Or did you love the god of flies who plagued the Hebrews and was splashed
With wine unto the waist? or Pasht, who had green beryls for her eyes?

'Or that young god, the Tyrian, who was more amorous than the dove
Of Ashtoroth? or did you love the god of the Assyrian

'Whose wings, like strange transparent talc, rose high above his hawk-faced head,
Painted with silver and with red and ribbed with rods of Oreichalch?

'Or did huge Apis from his car leap down and lay before your feet
Big blossoms of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured nenuphar?

. . . . . .

'Your lovers are not dead, I know. They will rise up and hear your voice

And clash their cymbals and rejoice and run to kiss your mouth. . . .

. . . . . .

'Are there not others more accursed, whiter with leprosies than I?
Are Abana and Pharphar dry that you come here to slake your thirst?

. . . . . .

'False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx old Charon, leaning on his oar,
Waits for my coin. Go thou before, and leave me to my crucifix,

'Whose pallid burden, sick with pain, watches the world with wearied eyes,
And weeps for every soul that dies, and weeps for every soul in vain.'"

For a moment he stood in silence and very still, and then, stretching out his hands once again, he began:—

"O Daughter of Typhon and Chimæra, let not our little faithfulness and the neglected offering, prevail with thee to turn thy face from us. If thy image is without garlands and upon thine altar-stone no blood is spilt, remember that in this city there is no fane built to thy worship, and that we four out of so many are here come to witness in the faith. If the roof that covers thee be but the bare sky and the common street thy temple and this purling stream thy Nile, visit not on us the sins of others, seekers after strange gods.

"O Sphinx, who sittest above the river of Life smiling into Eternity, who knowest the ways and unwisdom of all the gods, to whom Time is meaningless and Change but a cipher in the Infinite Series, hearken unto the prayer of these, thy worshippers. For though man's destiny be but as a dry leaf blown about by a little whirlwind on a gusty day, yet the part and the whole, the smallest and the greatest, microcosm and macrocosm, are equally finite against thine infinity, and in this thought we put the little courage that is ours to stand supplicant at thy high altar. Turn not, then, thy face from us: grant thou the requests

of these unhappy ones, and lighten, if it may be, a little the weariness that is in us."

Geoffrey Moxon paused and O'Donoghue, hiccoughing slightly, said that he was fed up with the whole business, using an adjective which cannot be printed, but which is universal amongst the soldiery and causes laughter at Courts Martial.

And Geoffrey continued:—

"O Sphinx, a poet may only rightly ask for one thing —the love of the most beautiful: let me then love the most beautiful and be loved by the most beautiful. I have spoken."

The poet stepped back into the deeper shadow of the parapet, where the other men stood. He took Connington by the elbow:—

"Go on, you ask next."

"You're drunk as an owl," said Peter. "All right, Goeffrey, I'll go and spout out my piece. Hope to heaven no bobby sees us: anyhow, perhaps he'll think we're merely rehearsing for a pageant. She didn't seem to take much account of your oration, old man, did she? Well, here goes."

Peter Connington stood before the Sphinx and spoke. His velvet coat and long, fair hair were properties more appropriate to the scene than the sober garments of the first speaker, and had Peter stood thus and spoken thus on the banks of the Seine, rather than beneath the Adelphi, even the curious traveller might well have passed on with a laugh at the Latin Quarter and memories of de Nerval in his heart.

"Antiquity," began Peter, "my friend, who has just sat down, has asked for love; and he calls himself a poet. O tempora! O mores! A poet! ποιητής, a maker: and he asks to be loved! Was there ever so comic a conception? You, O Sphinx, who have smiled for so many years, might well be moved to laugh a little at this funny man. A maker of children he may become—but a maker of sweet music? I forsee a discord; and few will be the

sonnets to his mistress's eyebrows when those eyebrows are for ever his. As for me, I have hardly dared to call myself by that name which he has forsworn to-night: I am a mere contriver in colours: a little better than a craftsman: to whom, at rare moments, a brief vision is given, to be ever too quickly taken away. Give me the power, then, with those tools in which I have a little skill, to make permanent emotions which are transitory: to recall that which is forgotten: to infuse the dead clay with a little life: to make of line and colour not only a pattern to please the eye, but to conserve in it an undying fire, so that all who pass will stay spellbound to look upon this picture, knowing that the unmeasured sorrow in their hearts for which they can find no words is herein manifest for all the world to see."

And Peter Connington joined his friends, a little out of breath from the fervour of his peroration. For a moment no one spoke, and the heavy silence that hung upon the Thames under the dark canopy of the clouds grew, as it seemed, in that one moment more intense.

Then O'Donoghue lurched forward, muttering thickly:—

"Bally old Sphinx, shaid nothing so far: I'm a Christian—not (hic) bloody heathen like me friends. See what old girl says to me.

He stood directly underneath the Sphinx, steadying himself with one hand against the stone plinth, and swayed a little from side to side as he spoke:—

"Look here, old girl," he began, "I'm a play-actor. Consequence, don't play-act off stage: leave that to these poet and painter fellows. Also—understand—also, I'm not one of these high-falutin' johnnies—who want love and art, you know—I'm a hard-working professional. I'll tell you what I'll have, old lady. Money! Give me the dibs: I'll do the rest. Of course, I know what I'm saying is not the high-toned ethical piece *as* per storybook, but I ain't . . ."

O'Donoghue broke off suddenly and stared open-mouthed at the Sphinx towering above him.

Out of the darkness the head of the Sphinx shone with a pale radiance: a radiance that seemed to fade and grow brighter—a shifting luminosity—changing in tone: now a pale rose, now glowing spectrally like the violet of the cathode beam: and the texture of the face was no longer that of bronze, but of the flesh of a god, in the likeness of whose image man is made. The same smile, an echo of which the founder had caught, now lay upon those no longer bronze lips, and three mortal men, gazing upon that pitiless beauty and that unfathomable smile, were very much afraid. The fourth man lay in a heap under the shadow of the plinth, not daring to look upon this living god, muttering incoherent prayers to his patron saint.

As the Sphinx spoke, there was no movement of lip: no change in that set smile: no flicker of light in those dark eyes whose vision outspanned infinity, and the words fell upon the ears of the hearers as musical as running water, yet as hard as agate and as coldly pitiless as Arctic starlight on the frozen sea.

"Three have asked: are there not four? Let the fourth man speak."

"P-p-please, may the desires of my friends be granted," said the voice of Matthew Sumner, a little hesitant, out of the further shadows.

"You may not ask on behalf of others," came the reply. "What ask you for yourself? Let me know the wishes of all and each shall have his wish granted."

"I know, of course, that it is really v-v-very ru-rude of me, and I am afraid you'll th-think it a l-little p-p-personal, b-but I should like to kn-know why you s-s-s-smile."

"Then come with me," said the Sphinx, in a great voice; and as the three frightened men, crouching by the parapet of the Embankment, still gazed upon the Sphinx, the figure began to move. Slowly it raised itself upon its fore-legs: and then on its hind-legs also, until it stood

four-footed there upon its pedestal: the body of a lion, with above it the beautiful face of the woman frozen into a smile. Slowly still it raised its body until it stood upright on the hind-legs only, the two fore-legs spread out like arms minatory above the fearful watchers. And as the Sphinx thus rose, so the form of the god grew, ever larger, while the vague outlines of houses and bridges and trees were blotted out by that colossus—and yet greater, until all the heavens were filled with that giant, and all earth lay in its shadow. Then, as the fear in the hearts of those who stood by grew so great as to be almost beyond bearing, a flash of blinding white light broke before their eyes in a deafening crash: and the half-god and half-beast that had filled the world was no longer to be seen, and before them stood the stone plinth, split in two, without so much upon it as a lion's claw.

A few minutes later four frightened men debouched from a dark alley into the Strand, happy to be under the bright light of arc lamps and to be once more among a number of people intent upon no stranger mission than to gild with a little glamour the mean features of the commonplace.

CHAPTER II: CITATIONS FROM THE CONTEMPORARY PRESS

From the *Evening News.*

BOLSHEVIST BOMB

A BOLSHEVIST outrage was committed late last night on the Embankment, in which an attempt was made to blow up Cleopatra's Needle. Happily this senseless piece of wanton destruction did not succeed, and only one of the bronze Sphinxes situated at the base of the Needle was destroyed. It is conjectured that the bomb must have blown the image into the Thames, as no fragments are to found on the Embankment. Constable Griffiths, in whose beat the Needle was, happened to be at the Waterloo Bridge end when the explosion occurred. He ran as quickly as he could to the spot but by the time he got there, whoever threw the bomb had escaped. It is understood, however, that the police have an important clue."

From the *Westminster Gazette.*

A MEANINGLESS OUTRAGE

"Late last night a bomb was thrown on the Embankment just above Waterloo Bridge, and damage was caused to one of the bronze Sphinxes at the foot of Cleopatra's Needle. As, at this late hour, the Embankment was deserted, the outrage appears to be quite meaningless. It may, perhaps, have been in the nature of an attempt to destroy the Needle—Nihilist outrages on public monuments have occurred before now—but it seems more likely to be the random action of some one of unsound mind. It would be foolish to attribute such vicarious vandalism to any political animus or to connect with social unrest what at most can be no more than an isolated piece of hooliganism or the folly of an escaped madman."

From the *Times*.

A somewhat more detailed account of the affair occupied half a column on page 9 of this journal. The incident was attributed to the Bolshevist element in London. A short leader on the matter appeared on page 13, as follows:—

BOLSHEVISM AND PUBLIC SAFETY

"In another part of this paper will be found an account of the Bolshevist outrage that was committed late on Tuesday night on the Thames Embankment. The object appears to have been the destruction of the obelisk known as Cleopatra's Needle. Though no loss of life occurred and the material damage done was small, yet such an accident cannot be reviewed without the gravest concern by the thoughtful. We have no wish here to discuss the adequacy of the police force, though our view in this matter is well known; and the partition of beats is one which is alone the concern of Sir Neil Macready; though it may be pertinent to point out that when the crime was committed at the obelisk, the nearest police constable appears to have been on the far side of Waterloo Bridge.

"It is, however, a question of the gravest moment to ask how alien Bolshevists of so dangerous a character are free in the Metropolis; for we hardly imagine this dastardly act of vandalism to have been perpetrated by an Englishman. The presence of undesirable aliens, Bolshevist propagandists and others, in London is well known. The laxity of the Government in the matter is almost incredible. By this overt act, the man in the street has been made fully alive to the destructive menace of Bolshevism. We have always believed in the sound common-sense of the British Public. We are inclined to think that public opinion will force the Government to abandon its criminal policy of *laissez-faire* in regard to the restriction of alien immigration. If this is effected, the slight damage caused to one of London's most historic monuments will not have been in vain."

BOOK II: RESEARCH INTO THE CAUSATION OF A SMILE

CHAPTER III: THE FARCICAL PREDICAMENT OF THE YOUNG MAN WHO WAS AFRAID

THE mercury stood at over thirty inches in the barometer, and even Americans, resident in London, opined that summer weather had come at last. The weather-wise talked of anticyclones and the high-pressure system; the evening papers sub-headlined the thermometer in default of more sensational matter; and the discontented who, a fortnight before, had inveighed against the vagaries of the English climate, were now monotonous in their complaint against these dog-days.

The Green Park, which stretches away from Piccadilly to Buckingham Palace, lay, a long triangle of green grass, bathed in the hot July sunshine. Here and there, under the shadow of the trees, upon light wooden chairs, painted green, sat those whose incomes permitted their clothes to be seen there, whose hearts were simple enough to enjoy the mere sunshine, and whose affairs allowed a little leisure before lunch.

A few minutes before noon, on this particularly sunny day, a tall man walked across the Green Park. He walked in the direction of Piccadilly from the Southern gate by the Palace, along the straight and broad path which debouches on Piccadilly under the windows of the Ritz Hotel.

In spite of the heat of the day, the tall man walked quickly, as though late for an appointment and in the deuce of a hurry; and every moment he quickened his pace; throwing, from time to time, an uneasy glance over his shoulder. Had he been elsewhere and dressed more suitably for the exercise, he might well have broken into a run. It is, however, difficult to run in field-boots and spurs, and so swift a mode of progression is out of place

in the Green Park. Besides a very beautiful pair of field-boots, which bore the unmistakable stamp of the most famous of bootmakers, the tall man wore Bedford cord breeches and a service jacket by a Savile Row tailor whose name I shall forbear to advertise. A cap bearing a red band and a black peak, edged with a row of gold leaves, together with a crown upon the shoulder-strap of the jacket, witnessed to the wearer's rank of Major and his employment on the General Staff: one red and three blue chevrons, a period of foreign service; one gold stripe, a wound; and a chaos of colour across the left breast, the recognition of an honourable achievement.

There were not many walkers in the Park at this hour on this day in July. It may be that it was too warm to tempt the idle away from the shade given by the narrow streets or the more restful coolness of an armchair in the club window; it may have been that, as asserted in the press, London, despite its population of five million people, was empty; it may have been these two causes combined, that left the Park less walked-in than usual and a number of the chairs under the trees unoccupied.

As the Major, walking faster than ever, regardless of the heat and almost, it would seem, regardless of the curious, came abreast of a small group of chairs under a plane tree on his left, he stopped abruptly.

He looked uneasily over his shoulder in the direction from which he had come. The long path was deserted, but yet, as he was still looking backwards, a small group of people appeared at the gate at the end. With a decided motion, as if having at that instant made up his mind, the Major stepped out of the path on to the grass and walked towards the chairs under the plane tree. Only one chair was being used. Upon it sat a little man with a dark beard, quietly dressed in a suit of grey tweed, smoking a cigarette in a long holder. The Major sat down hurriedly on the left side of the little man, and turning at once towards him said, in a pleasing voice, but very rapidly:—

"I beg, sir, that you will excuse the impudence of a stranger; and forgive the rudeness of a request by your courtesy in accepting it—leaving me to explain later why I am so impertinent."

"Sir," began the other, "anything that I can do . . ."

"I entreat you," interrupted the Major, "if you are not otherwise engaged, to lunch with me."

"Indeed, I have nothing to do," answered the little man, "and if you seriously wish me to lunch with you, it would be rude on my part to refuse your hospitality; though why you should saddle yourself with my company, I do not know. Believe me, I am a very dull dog indeed and a poor table companion."

"I shall, nevertheless," said the Major, with a slight smile, "be your debtor." He glanced uneasily to his right down the path along which he had come.

"Might I ask your name?" added the Major, suddenly.

"My name is Sumner—Matthew Sumner," replied the little man, and, following the glance of his companion, he saw that a group of four or five people were quickly approaching the place where they were sitting. As they came nearer, he saw that they consisted of three men and two women. The women were young and fashionably dressed, and one of them was more than ordinarily beautiful. Of the men, one was a Colonel in the uniform of the Irish Guards, one was a subaltern of a cavalry regiment and the third a young man in a silk hat, a morning coat and a monocle. They came across the grass to where the Major was sitting.

"Charles," cried the man in the tall hat, "what on earth did you run away for? You've got to come and lunch with us, you know."

"We *must* have the lion to lunch," said one of the women.

"Come on, dear boy," broke in the Colonel, "don't be shy—you've got to face the music: and Doris will be desolate if you don't come."

"Alas," said the Major, "I am already booked for lunch,

with a very old friend of mine—let me introduce you—Mr. Matthew Sumner: Lady Alice Pendragon: Miss Doris Carleon-Pugh: Lord Rushmore: Colonel Bevan: Mr. Cyril Merrivale. Mr. Sumner is one of my oldest friends: we were at school together: he is only in London for a few days. I am so sorry: I should love to have come: but so old a friend—we meet so seldom—is it not so?"

"Indeed," said Mr. Matthew Sumner, with a slight smile, "I have known Charles for a very long time."

"Then, I suppose, we can't persuade you to come," said Lady Pendragon. "Mr. Sumner, it's very wrong of you to take Charles away from us on such a day," and, after a few commonplace remarks and the usual civilities, the five walked on towards Piccadilly.

"Mr. Sumner," said the Major, "in return let me hasten to give you my name: it is Fenton—Charles Fenton. I am, as you see, an officer on the General Staff, and I hold, at the moment, an appointment in the A.G.'s office. You will by now have perceived the immediate cause of my having asked you to do me the honour of lunching with me. To ask any one for his company in order to avoid the company of others, is, I know, a gross incivility: but it will at least free you from any suspicion that I asked you, a complete stranger to me, to lunch with me on account of any entertaining oddity in your dress or deportment, or out of vulgar inquisitiveness to inquire into the opinions of another in the rôle of an intellectual Autolycus."

"Please, Major Fenton," said Matthew Sumner, "apologise no further: I am much looking forward to the pleasure of lunching with you."

"Then let us go," answered the Major, getting up from his chair, "and at table I will tell you why I would avoid those well-meaning people; and also, if it does not tire you, something of myself."

The dining-room of the Ritz Hotel—I mean the one above-ground, not the crypt of these degenerate days—is a very pleasant room overlooking the Park. In one

of the window recesses in this room Major Fenton and Mr. Matthew Sumner sat down to lunch.

"I must excuse myself," the Major had said, "from entertaining you at my Club on two counts: the chef here is, I think, a man of more imagination and of, at least, equal skill, and I am desirous of avoiding my friends."

During the melon and the mayonnaise which followed, Major Fenton spoke only of trivial matters: the small change of table-talk: industrial unrest: the latest departmental scandal: the contemporary divorce case: the current quip on prohibition. But a Martini with the melon had undermined such little reserve as is the common heritage of Englishmen and a glass of Heidsieck removed altogether any impediment to a free speech.

"You will be very rightly curious," said the Major, "why I was to such an extent anxious not to lunch with some friends as to risk the rebuff of a refusal from a stranger."

Matthew Sumner made apologetic noises, and Major Fenton continued:—

"At the time I was crossing the Park, I had just come from an investiture at the Palace, where I received this."

With these words, the Major placed upon the table-cloth a small leather case and sprang open the lid. Within, upon a bed of dark velvet, lay a white enamelled cross edged with gold, attached to a short length of red and blue ribbon.

Sumner stared across the table with wide-open eyes.

"Is that the Victoria Cross?" he exclaimed, in an awed voice.

"No," replied the other, "it is not the Victoria Cross. The Victoria Cross, as no doubt you are aware, is only given for conspicuous valour. My valour has never been conspicuous. It is the D.S.O."

"The Distinguished Service Order," said Mr. Matthew Sumner reverently. "Major Fenton, you are making me feel both proud and humble."

"My God!" groaned the Major, "you're as bad as the others."

"I beg your pardon?" asked Matthew Sumner, a little mystified.

"It is no matter. Mr. Sumner, are you conversant with the various ribbons to which are attached the Service decorations?"

"I am afraid I am very ignorant in these matters. I was, unhappily, unable to take part in the war on account of a physical disability, and I am by temperament a recluse. As such, I have envied much, and admired very greatly, all men of action."

"Then, Mr. Sumner, let me explain to you these decorations which I am wearing. They are the D.S.O., the French Legion of Honour, the M.C. with one bar, the Italian Order of Lazarus and St. John, the M.V.O., the D.C.M., the Mons star and the War Medal and Allied & Victory ribbons."

Major Fenton, you are making a man of peace feel very envious."

"You have little cause to be. Mr. Sumner, I am a coward," and with this confession, made in a voice a semitone above the normal, Major Fenton emptied his glass of champagne and stared steadily out of the window into the Park, as if a little hesitant of seeing the effect of this statement upon his companion. Mr. Matthew Sumner, however did not seem in the least astonished at this shameful confession. He smiled comfortably, and said in a satisfied tone:—

"I have always been given to understand that the brave are also modest. I am happy in having this impression confirmed."

Fenton swung round from the window, and bringing both his fists down upon the table with a bang, ejaculated:—

"My God!"

A waiter hurried up.

"Yes, sare?" he asked.

"Go to the devil!" said the Major fiercely—and the well-disciplined servitor faded away.

"That," continued the soldier, in a quieter voice, "is the Horror of the Third Degree. No one ever believes me—and the more I advertise my cowardice, the braver I am supposed to be. It is a common belief (which you seem to share) that modesty and bravery go together. My dear sir, I can assure you that nothing is further from the truth. Courage and modesty have no interrelation whatsoever. Some modest men are brave and some are cowards: some brave men are modest, many are not. To suppose all brave men modest is about as ridiculous as to suppose all Majors fat or all sailors sentimental. The other day a recipient of the Victoria Cross was sentenced to hard labour for brutally ill-using his wife. Believe me, courage, like colour-blindness or varicose veins, is largely an accidental qualification."

"Surely . . ." began Sumner, but the Major ignored the interruption.

"I will begin," he continued, in a contemplative voice, "at the beginning, which, for the purposes of this history, shall be August of the year 1914. I am not, you comprehend, an *officier de carrière:* I am unmarried, and at that date I was living in London occupying myself in the byways of scholarship and as an amateur of the arts. An excursus in the *Classical Review* on Macrobius created a little attention among those interested in the period, and you may possibly have seen a small brochure of mine upon the drawings of Flaxman. My father's father was an Army contractor, and I believe a great scoundrel; and I was at liberty to pursue my studies without thought of pecuniary considerations. Nothing was further from my thoughts at this time than that I should ever hold the King's commission, and I was, comparatively speaking, a happy man. I was wealthy, popular and recognized as a *littérateur* of some ability.

"The fourth of August found me busy with a critical tract on Aulus Gellius: that tract was never finished;

and on the fourth of the ensuing month I was Corporal Fenton, a Despatch Rider at the British General Headquarters in France.

"To many, the first few months of the war were days of horror and despair, but to not a few others, and among them myself, they were a prolonged picnic, enlivened by the excitement of the uncertain fortunes of the war.

"I cannot pretend that I encountered much danger. Some side-slips, a burst tyre, a stray shot from a wandering Uhlan, the sight of a dozen of them on a distant hill-top, and the common rumours and alarms were all the dangers of the retreat that I suffered. The carrying of a confidential despatch to Brigadier-General X, who happened to be my cousin, won for me the D.C.M., and by the end of the year I was commissioned as officer Despatch Rider to the *N*th Corps Signals.

"To the lay mind, the position of an officer of Despatch Riders no doubt implies a certain danger and insecurity. One may imagine such an officer engaged upon the perilous task of carrying despatches through the enemy zone to units that have been cut off, risking death or at least capture at every instant, and running the gauntlet of the sniper and the ambuscade. Such may have been the lot of this officer in earlier campaigns. I can assure you, however, that my duties consisted in the keeping of a register in an office several miles from the line; and the sound of distant gun-fire or convoys of wounded passing through to the C.C.S., were all there were to remind one of the chance of death."

"Excuse me," began Matthew Sumner, "but surely a soldier's duty is to obey. You voluntarily and without delay offered your services: if those in command chose to employ you where you could be of most use, surely——"

"I beg you not to interrupt," said Major Fenton, a little petulantly, "my history is not completed.

"For some months I served in this capacity. I am told that my duties were efficiently carried out and I was popular in mess. Being naturally of a social disposition

and something of an epicure, I entertained my O.C. to dinner at Cassel, on which occasion I showed something of my pre-war form in the ordering of a dinner and in the entertainment of a guest. I beg you to believe that there was no *arrière pensée* in my hospitality. Nevertheless, I was decorated shortly afterwards with the Military Cross."

Major Fenton sighed deeply.

"I have been told," he added, "that this decoration has been given for less honourable actions than the choice of a dinner.

"In the spring of 1915 I became Captain and Adjutant to the Army Signal Company, and in the charming old-world village of L., amidst fields full of flowers and the sweet-scented woods, I instilled the rudiments of Army discipline into post-office employees, signed indents, edited the B. 213's, attended parades, fed the pigeons, and received the M.V.O. for repairs done to a bath. In the autumn of that year I was transferred to Intelligence and became Intelligence Officer to the *M*th Corps. Here, in the course of my duties, I had to enter the shelled areas, and from time to time actually came under desultory shell-fire. The nearest shell to me was, I think, some hundred yards away; nevertheless, I was very frightened indeed and contracted from then onwards that almost morbid horror of shell-fire that has embittered my life ever since."

"But surely now that the war is over . . ."

"Let me continue. I say that after a year of warfare these vicarious journeys to Brigade Headquarters were my first experience of being shelled. You will say that as an experience of shell-fire, this occasional coquetting with a 4.2 or a 5.9; the small, to some almost pleasurable, thrills of passing a cross-roads subject to intermittent shelling perhaps twice in the twenty-four hours—you will dub such occasional excursions a bagatelle, and you will be right. The infantry, and such technical units as work with them, are the heroes of this war, and these men would not consider such excitements worth talking of: indeed, they would not think of them at all.

"On only one occasion have I been actually in the line. I had been up to Brigade Headquarters and I stayed to mess in the H.Q. dug-out. I am sorry to say that I got very drunk indeed, and after dinner, fired by a bottle of champagne and several liqueurs, I insisted on going up to the I-Tock . . ."

"The what?" asked Mr. Matthew Sumner showing genuine interest.

"The I-Tock—that is, the listening set—and listening myself to the conversation overhead. I threaded the interminable labyrinth of trenches, for once thoughtless of shells, under the influence of the Bacchi potion, up to the front line. Never could there have been a quieter night: under a full moon, any idea of a raid was out of the question, and even the machine-guns were silent. Ten minutes after I had left the I-Tock dug-out, a stray shell blew it in and killed the subaltern in charge. Returning to H.Q.'s, I wrote my report, and later received a bar to my Military Cross. . . .

"I did not remain long with the Corps Intelligence. I am bi-lingual, having spent a year at the Sorbonne, and I was shortly afterwards attached as a liaison officer to the Staff of the *N*th French Army. The Marquis de Roquevillers, who was A.D.C. to the General Commanding, had been a fellow-student with me in Paris, and my ability as a raconteur in mess was, I believe, greatly appreciated. I returned to the British Army as an Officer of the Legion of Honour. There is, unhappily, too much truth in the phrase 'to him that hath shall be given.' The G.O.C. wrote a quite unnecessary letter of praise to British G.H.Q. when I left: and to the Legion of Honour was added shortly afterwards the D.S.O., which I to-day went to the Palace to receive.

"From now onwards my life became burdensome to me. The shameful knowledge of my cowardice never left me. Unfortunately, I am by temperament romantic and introspective: unlike Parolles, I could not content myself to 'sleep as soft as captain shall': Parolles, you will perceive,

was a better man than I am: he had, at least, the courage of his convictions.

"You will say that it was easy to apply for a transfer to the infantry. But I never reached the point of doing so: my courage always failed me at the last moment. Instead of going up the line, I gravitated to the back areas. I became a G 3 at the Fifth Army H.Q., where I received the Order of Lazarus and St. John during one of the periodical distributions of foreign decorations.

"Mr. Matthew Sumner, it is a horrible thing to lose one's self-respect. I had one supreme chance given me to redeem, at least in part, my shameful cowardice. I was with the Fifth Army H.Q. during the famous retreat from Nesle in March of '18. The Headquarters moved, as you know, first to Villers-Bretonneux and then to Dury on the Amiens-Paris road. It was then that volunteers were asked for from all H.Q., and administrative units to take over the trenches from the shattered divisions and to hold, at all costs, the line until fresh troops could be brought up. I volunteered for this duty, Mr. Sumner, and I was told that I could not, on any account, be spared: you may say that I was too good a soldier—I *know* that I was too great a coward—to disobey such orders.

"But," broke in Matthew Sumner, "you are hypochondriacal in your self-disesteem: you, at least, volunteered: if you had been accepted . . ."

"Mr. Sumner, I *knew* that I should not be allowed to go. Had I not known this I cannot persuade myself that I would have volunteered.

"When the Fifth Army went into cadre, I was transferred to G.H.Q. as a G 2 in the I Branch. I have, alas, three supreme qualifications as a General Staff Officer: I have an undeniable gift for the writing of minutes; I am unsurpassed as a raconteur in mess; and I was educated at Winchester."

"Major Fenton," said Mr. Sumner, "you are a very candid man. Physical courage is, indeed, as you have pointed out, largely an accidental attribute: a question

of nerves and tissue and, as one might say, of molecular arrangement. It is not given to every man to be a Crillon. Let me, at least, say that I have never met any one possessed of so great an intellectual courage as yourself."

"I spoke a little while ago," replied Major Fenton, "of the Horror of the Third Degree. I am not allowed even to retrieve my physical cowardice by my intellectual courage: for however much I publish my shame, the more are people convinced that I am not telling the truth: even the satisfaction of this penance is denied me.

"This, then, is the Horror of the Third Degree. The Horror of the Second Degree is the remembrance, which cannot be forgotten, that I must always bear in mind how for four years I refused the opportunity daily offered to me. It is a terrible thing, Mr. Sumner, to have this thought always with one."

Major Fenton stirred his coffee, and seemed to have fallen into a black reverie. For some minutes he said nothing and appeared to have forgotten the existence of his companion.

"Major Fenton," said Matthew Sumner, at last, with a little hesitation in his voice, "you have spoken of the Horror of the Second and of the Third Degree. Is there then a Horror of the First Degree?"

The Major stared across the table at Matthew Sumner as though he had just remembered his presence there.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "there is a Horror of the First Degree. But first let us fortify ourselves. Waiter, some of the '48 brandy!"

Major Fenton drank his brandy when it was brought to him, at one gulp.

"The Horror of the First Degree," he said, "is that I am only afraid of one thing. I am not, in general, a physical coward. Since I have been back in London I have attempted a number of daring actions in the hope of recovering a little of my self-respect. Alas! I can find nothing of which I am really afraid. Horsemanship has no terrors for me: I am more at home in the saddle than

I am on my feet: a week's leave spent in cliff-climbing won me a local reputation and an added despair: I do not know what it is to be afraid of heights: I *know* that my foot *never* slips. Latterly, I have tried flying. Believe me, Mr. Sumner, in a few weeks I have created a sensation as a stunt flyer which has made me the object of envy, hatred and malice to half the Air Force personnel. I *am not afraid of it.* It is vain to flatter oneself that one is courageous in doing things of which one is not in the least afraid.

"There is only one thing that can recover for me something of my self-esteem: that will allay the fever that is within and bring me a little peace; and that is the opportunity voluntarily to undergo a *barrage.* Mr. Matthew Sumner, that opportunity will never return. This is the Horror of the First Degree."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Sumner simply.

> "'The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,'"

quoted Major Fenton,

> "'Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
> Can lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all thy Tears wash out a word of it.'

"Mr. Sumner, you will have another cigar?"

"Indeed, no, thank you. I really must be going. I owe you a thousand thanks for so excellent a luncheon, and I feel more deeply honoured by your confidence than I can well say. Major Fenton, there may yet be another war."

"But never another one such as this," sighed the Major; "good-bye."

Mr. Matthew Sumner was half-way through the door into the street when he suddenly remembered something. He almost ran back across the lounge to where Major Fenton was still standing.

"Major Fenton," he said, happily, "you have not done

yourself common justice. At least you have been wounded. There is that always to be remembered."

The officer looked wearily at Matthew Sumner and shook his head.

"Ah, the wound stripe? Yes, sir, I *have* been wounded: I was wounded one hundred yards from the Piccadilly Hotel, and the plate-glass windows of Messrs. Swan and Edgar's emporium suffered in the same engagement."

CHAPTER IV: THE JOLLY EMPLOYMENT OF DR. ANDREW HOLL

MUCH has been said in praise of gardens, and much in dispraise of the English climate. It might be thought that too little sun, too much wind and rain, and above all a great uncertainty in these visitations (so that it blows hot and cold in the division of a day and the most weather-wise are at fault about the morrow), would make gardening in these isles a hazardous act, promising, at best, a mediocre achievement. Flowers—and a garden without flowers is a cold affair—do naturally turn to the sun—the little sun that here is—and frost in late spring kills the tender buds, and high winds in summer blow away the petals of such flowers as have escaped this infant mortality and grown to a man's estate; sudden changes at all times imperil the short life of a flower; and if the growth of a rose from its cradling in the green calyx to its final efflorescence of fragrant and creamy petals could be insured (and for all that I know it can be), the premium, I take it, would be an high one.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these dangers and discouragements, the gardens of England are the most beautiful in the world. Patriotic natives and your informed traveller talk much of the excellence of the art in other lands. Versailles and the Boboli and Shiraz, all have their panegyrists, but though there be great delight in your French, Italian, Persian, Dutch, Japanese (and for all I know to the contrary Russian, Chinese, Swedish or Siamese) gardens, the fact remains that the best examples of all of these are to be seen in England. Moreover, in the space of a few acres, you may walk in the gardens of two or three countries: from England, through

a mere gate in the wall, you may walk soberly upon the square grey flagstones of your Dutch garden; or down a flight of steps among the roses and fountains so beloved of Omar; or again, through a gap in a yew hedge, among formal cypresses and before a copy of Giovanni, think yourself once more above the Arno: and all at less cost to the purse and less fatigue to the body than did you bestir yourself to journey to foreign parts.

But though the science and the art of gardening in England is "compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects," so that the palace of his most English Majesty is famous for its Dutch garden and the Earl of Odham for his Tuscan terraces: though Lord Tullwideney has Persia at his back-door and Sir Simon Bute makes homesick the heart of his Japanese guests, it is the English garden, of all these many gardens in England, which is the finest of all: and the art of the English garden is centred (at least to my mind) in the herbaceous border. There are many herbaceous borders that are well known in England and many more that are noteworthy: but the herbaceous border of Stappham Old Place is one of the first half-dozen in the kingdom. Students of the more modern school may prefer Ashwortley or Beacon Tamfield, but to Mr. Matthew Sumner, as he walked beside the border, it seemed one of the fairest things he had ever seen. Why Mr. Matthew Sumner was thus, on this sunny afternoon, admiring the larkspurs and Canterbury bells and phlox and poppies and hollyhocks and campanulas, and many other flowers whose names he did not know, in the gardens of Stappham Old Place, was a question that he himself would have been put to to answer. It is true that some days before he had received a printed invitation from Lady Flayne to a garden-party organized (it seemed) for the very laudable purpose of helping the Primrose League. Mr. Matthew Sumner was not interested in the Primrose League—except for a vague notion that it had something to do with Lord Rosebery, he did not know what the Primrose League

was—and he had no remembrance of Lady Flayne. His modesty did not allow him to suppose that he had been asked because he was sufficiently well known to be desirable as a guest, and the method of issuing formal invitations with the help of *Who's Who* did not occur to him: he presumed that he had been sent the invitation in error.

Nevertheless, in spite of this and of his distaste for such functions, he was moved to accept the invitation, and the afternoon of July 25th found him walking beside the famous herbaceous border of Stappham Old Place.

Though Matthew Sumner had not previously met Lady Flayne, her name was not altogether unknown to him. Lady Flayne appeared at intervals in the *Tatler,* and he had a vague remembrance of a novel that had been banned at Mudie's: also there was the late Sir Roland Flayne, who had caused some embarrassment to his party during his brief political career. The only child, Sir Hugh Flayne, was a young man about twenty-seven years of age: and Sumner, calling to mind some idle club gossip, remembered that he was said to be of unsound mind.

Matthew Sumner had the herbaceous border to himself: the many guests were congregated upon the lawns and terraces below the house, and few wandered far from the music and refreshment provided. The gardens were large, and in this remote part Sumner had easily escaped from a crowd with which he found himself out of sympathy. Twice he paced the long length of the border and wondered why, after all, he had come there: to this function, of a kind that he so despised: and then, his mind dwelling upon the beauty upon which he now gazed, a pity began to grow in his heart, in thinking upon the inheritor of all this loveliness. He wondered to what extent Sir Hugh Flayne was able to enjoy his heritage, or if the disarranging of the molecules in that grey matrix of which still so little is known made it impossible for him even to perceive the deep blue of the delphiniums or the scarlet poppies, or to smell the mingled scents that blew about the

pathway, or to know that the sun shone. Ruminating thus, he reached for the second time the far end of the border, where the gravel path that ran beside it slipped through an arch in a wall and turned in time to stone steps leading to the lily-ponds.

As he came up to the arch, which framed a picture of still water and green trees and the blue of the distant Cotswolds, a tall figure stepped into the opening from a side path on the further side of the wall and stood a moment as it were framed therein. He had a clean-shaven, pleasant, studious-looking face, and his rather long nose bore a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez attached to a thin black silk cord. His hair was thin and of a pale gold tint, receding on the temples; he stooped slightly and was dressed in a pair of white flannel trousers and a rough jacket of Harris tweed.

He hesitated for a moment, and then, stepping forward, spoke to Matthew Sumner in a pleasant, if somewhat pedantic voice:—

"You are admiring the border?" he said.

"I am indeed: it is the most lovely thing of its kind I have yet seen. I slipped away from the crowd on the lawn, and I am glad to have discovered so beautiful a place."

"It is, as of course you know, quite famous: it is probably the second best herbaceous border in England. All the gardens of the Old Place are beautiful, but they who first laid out the gardens reached the acme of their art in this border, running high above the rest of the garden, and ending, as you see, with so fine a view through a wall."

"It is all very lovely," replied Mr. Sumner, with something of a sigh—"I was only just now thinking . . ." and Matthew Sumner stopped, for it suddenly occurred to him that he with whom he was now talking might himself be Sir Hugh.

"You were thinking," said the other, gently, "how great a pity it was that these fair acres should be the heritage of one unable to enjoy them."

"I—I . . . really . . . I . . ." stammered Mr. Matthew Sumner.

"I am not Sir Hugh Flayne, I am his doctor: yes, it is very pitiful."

"I was thinking that: and about to say so. And then I thought that . . . I am very tactless, and often say what I should not: I began to fear I had done so."

"No, no: I am merely the doctor: I must introduce myself: my name is Holl—Dr. Andrew Holl. I see that you have not met Sir Hugh: he is not so out of his senses that any lacunæ are evident in a few minutes' conversation. He is versatile, something of a scholar and a real inheritor of the Flayne charm of manner: but capricious—terribly capricious—and like so very many of those afflicted with cerebral disorders, wonderfully, and, at times, unnecessarily, acute in perceiving ideation in others."

"I suppose he is aware . . ." began Mr. Matthew Sumner, as they turned and paced backwards together along the gravel path, "of his defects?"

"Yes: and this I think makes his case the more to be pitied. At times he approaches normality, and I believe certain poetical trifles which he from time to time produces are not without merit: but I am not a judge in these matters. I always feel less pity for an out-and-out lunatic —the quite unconscious specialist who thinks he is Julius Cæsar or a poached egg or a pillar-box—than for those who are generically (and clumsily) described as 'mentally deficient.' The former are at least happy in a delusion that no power on earth can destroy. I once knew a lunatic who thought himself a garden-hose and was as supernally happy holding a brass nozzle over the asylum flower-beds as any general receiving the submission of the enemy or a scientist successful in his research."

"There is occasion for the exercise of much pity in the world," said Mr. Matthew Sumner.

"There is," said Dr. Holl, slowly—and a shadow seemed to have fallen on his face even in that bright sunlight in this high place.

"Sir," he continued, after a pause, "I judge you to be—if you will forgive me so impertinent a remark—of a sympathetic nature—*simpatico*—the greatest of virtues, as the Italians have it. Perhaps I may talk of myself a little without boring you too much?"

Dr. Holl did not allow time for Matthew Sumner to make any reply, but continued, speaking a little hurriedly at first:—

"My father was a feckless man with a large family and was a general practitioner in one of the Northern suburbs. The practice was extensive: it was not lucrative. The life of a G.P. under such conditions is not an easy one. Much of late has been written to the disrepute of the medical profession: I think if some of these pamphleteers had a wider knowledge of the life of the average G.P., they would be silent out of very pity. People have less regard for a doctor than a man has for his groom: a man with the stomach-ache through over-eating takes no thought for the doctor, and my father was used to say, in his more jocular moments, that an increase in the birth-rate of the district corresponded to a rise in the mortality of the local practitioners: and if any manufacturer dared to treat his employees as the public does the doctor, the trade union would have something to say about the business. The B.M.A. has its functions: the smaller fry, however, escape the ministrations of these Olympians. Moreover, my father suffered from a painful and incurable ulceration of the stomach, and although the doctor who cannot cure himself is commonly regarded as a comic figure, I myself have been unable to see the humour in it.

"However, it is not of my father that I wish to speak, but of myself. I partly drifted and was partly pushed into the medical profession. At least I swore never to be a G.P.: I knew the seamy side too well. I decided to specialize: I would take up lunacy: it seemed to offer a better monetary return than most specialisation.

"There are unnumbered difficulties before any one who wishes to specialize in medicine and who has no money

upon which to live during his extended probation. A minor scholarship at Christ's College, Cambridge, enabled me to live in a garret, pass a number of examinations and fail to profit from those social assets which are valued in the older Universities. Since those days I have been unmoved to pity in reading of the privations of students in the pages of the Scots novelists. To write up your lecture notes on the edge of your washstand or to cook a bloater over a gas-burner, is, I fancy, in Scotland, to be *à la mode,* and reciprocity in bloaters is no doubt common. In Cambridge I ate my bloater alone.

"I have always thought," continued Dr. Andrew Holl, after a pause, "that *The Pickwick Papers* is the most entertaining book ever written, but there are certain pages in it that I always skip. To my mind, Benjamin Allen and Bob Sawyer are not humorous: they are too near reality to be anything but tragic.

"If my days at Cambridge are chiefly remembered as a ceaseless suppression of a social aptitude, the years ensuing are recalled chiefly by an increasing distaste for the work that I had chosen. Your illustrious alienist, consulted in Harley Street on the demented progeny of a tainted aristocracy, is one picture: the madhouse doctor is another. I sincerely trust, sir, that you may never have to live in a lunatic asylum."

Dr. Holl said these last words with such fervour that Matthew Sumner could scarcely suppress the vestige of a smile. The doctor, seeing something of this concluded:—

"I was about to add, except as a patient.

"For some years I drifted from asylum to asylum—a monotony that was only broken by my war service. When, on the ending of the war, the Army no longer needed me, I returned to my pre-war avocation, only to find the minor posts that I had held and detested, so sought after as to be outside my reach: and I found myself stranded with £300 of gratuity money and a mental paraphernalia four years out of date. By great good luck and the help of a man who shared a dug-out with me at

Auvillers I got this billet. I am bound to admit that the duties are not heavy; the surroundings are, as you see, beautiful; I come in contact, occasionally, with interesting, cultured and even sympathetic people, and the remuneration is at least adequate. I am now thirty-two years of age, although I am told I look younger; I am physically sound: I am unmarried and my income is sufficient for my needs: I have come through a great campaign, if not with credit, still, without dishonour: why, then, should I despair?"

"Dr. Holl, I see no reason: you are doubtless ambitious, and ambition is the natural progenitor of discontent. Beyond this temperamental disqualification, you should, I think, be reasonably happy. I do not doubt but that you will be successful: it is given to few men to secure even a moderate achievement, this side of forty."

"There is nevertheless a reason," said Dr. Andrew Holl, sadly, and for some yards the two men paced back along the great border in silence. Presently the doctor spoke again:—

"I remember once reading in an essay—I think by Emerson—that a painter, in order properly to paint a tree, had himself to become a tree. I do not know how far this is true. I know nothing of the lives of painters. Nor do I know whether or no an engineer develops a mechanical habit, a dancer goes to his dinner in a jig, or if your epic poet shaves himself in a rhythmical motion approximating to an iambic pentameter, or if your impresario is musical in his cups. One remembers the mathematician in Hudibras:—

> "'In mathematics he was greater
> Than Tycho Brahe, or Erra Pater:
> For he, by geometric scale,
> Could take the size of pots of ale;
> Resolve by sines and tangents, straight,
> If bread or butter wanted weight.'

"Nor am I aware—for statisticians are mute upon this point—of the percentage of phthisis specialists who are

consumptive, of oculists who are short-sighted, or of capillarists who wear wigs—but the number of mad doctors who go mad—my God! their name must be legion!"

With a shudder that shook his whole frame, Dr. Andrew Holl, as though wishful of avoiding the glance of his companion, stared fixedly at a particularly large sunflower, which smiled insolently back at him in the bright sunlight.

"The science of auto-suggestion," continued Dr. Holl, in a more composed voice, "is yet in its infancy. Do you realize, you happy people, who live and have your being among other normal and happy people, what it is—what, in its nature, it must be—to be always in the company of the insane? Man, I suppose, is by nature imitative. If you live for some time with anybody who stutters you will readily acquire the impediment: the use of a common *cliché*—'don't you know,' or 'oh, yes'—is more catching than the measles. If a mere trick of the speech is thus easily borrowed, will not a trick of the brain be more easily acquired? The suggestion is so much more subtle and persuasive, the plate so much the more sensitive to the image. In one asylum where I was there was a patient who had the not uncommon rhyme delusion: he habitually spoke (or tried to speak) in rhymed periods. I found myself writing prescriptions in metre and miserable in not finding a rhyme for 'scruple'! I once had charge of a lunatic who was afraid of the moonlight, and I have had to exercise the utmost will-power to restrain myself from pulling down the blind over my bedroom window on moonlight nights. And always there is a horror in my soul that I too may be mad."

"I am very sorry for you," said Mr. Matthew Sumner, gently, "but surely you are too sensitive: imitativeness, as you rightly say, is natural, and . . ."

"Ah, ah!" laughed Dr. Holl, and the laughter seemed to Sumner at variance with the sunshine and the flowers, producing a mental shock in the listener as a bar of ragtime might in a Chopin prelude; "hah, hah, hah!—*sensitivity*. The romantic evasion in the mouth of the relative: how

often have I not heard it? 'Andrew'—'Arthur,' I mean, or whatever the patient's name is, 'is too sensitive—really that is all!' I assure you that more than once, when filling in a certificate of lunacy, I have signed my name in the wrong place! It sounds funny, doesn't it? I have passed the matter off with a laugh, and I don't like to recall the effort that laughter has caused me. The last time I did it I was hilarious—an orgy of laughter. Forced merriment is an art—one laughs . . . I can show you . . ."

"Please don't," said Matthew Sumner, involuntarily laying his hand on the doctor's arm.

"No, no, I must not: I forget: I am sorry. After all, your lunatic is happy enough, isn't he? Do you know I have often, alone in my own room, filled in certificates with my name in both places—just to see how it looked. The doctor who certifies himself insane—a humorous notion. I am a funny dog, you know—a droll fellow," and Dr. Andrew Holl wagged his head at Mr. Matthew Sumner in a manner that made the latter feel a little sick.

"Why don't you do something else?" said Sumner at last, after a rather painful silence, "there is plenty of work to be done in the world."

"For what else am I fitted? One must live: I am well paid here too: and Sir Hugh—I know—likes me. He is a good fellow, Sir Hugh: and entertaining. You should see him imitating a sundial. He is a clever fellow, is Sir Hugh Flayne—and a wag. Well, I must be going: I'll be wanted. Good-bye: it was good of you to listen."

"Good-bye, Dr. Holl, but take my advice: a change of employment is by no means a bad thing."

"Well, well; perhaps I may: no doubt I could sell bootlaces in the Strand as well as anybody."

Mr. Matthew Sumner gazed at the retreating figure of the doctor a moment, and then, a little sorrowfully, walked to the end of the herbaceous border and through the arch in the wall into the lower garden. He had already grown a distaste for those beautiful and passionless flowers,

and the straight gravel path seemed pitiless and the sunlight a splendid mockery.

He walked through the Dutch garden, heedless of the parterres and the trimmed box, and down across the terraces until he reached the lily-ponds. Here too, the Primrose Leaguers had failed to adventure and he had the still pools, with their burden of white and wax-like blossoms asleep upon their broad green leaves, to himself. Or so he thought, until, for he had fallen into a deep reverie, he almost ran into a tall, motionless figure that stood in a stiff, upright attitude in the path between two of the ponds.

"I beg your pardon," said Sumner, confusedly.

"Not at all," said the other.

Only the muscles of his face moved: he still stood rigidly, with his arms at his side, motionless, his gaze fixed straight before him and his head not a quarter of an inch out of the perpendicular—neither to the left lily-pond nor to the right lily-pond: nor forwards towards the clump of copper beeches: nor backward towards the roses: a Grenadier might have envied him his pose, in spite of all tradition. He stood there—an immobile figure of a man, dressed in a suit of dark grey tweed. He wore a butterfly collar and a sombre tie: he wore no hat: his hair was dark and straight, and a toothbrush of a moustache heightened the dead pallor of his face. He stood in the centre of a rude circle traced on the gravel—presumably with the walking-stick that lay on the path a few yards away.

"Put-your-watch-right," he said, suddenly and very quickly, running one word into the next like a station porter.

"I beg your pardon," said Matthew Sumner again.

"Put your watch right by me," repeated the other, more distinctly: "I'm a sundial."

"Oh," said Sumner, blankly.

"Well, never mind; no doubt your watch *is* right," said the sundial, pleasantly, and with these words he stepped

out of the circle, picked up the walking-stick, and turning to Matthew Sumner, continued:—

"I'm mad, you know. You're not afraid to be alone with me, are you? I assure you I'm quite harmless. Eccentric—shall we say?—a little eccentric . . . eccentric . . ." He repeated the words "eccentric—a little eccentric," five or six times, and then without giving Mr. Matthew Sumner time to say anything: "I can be lots of things, you know: a versatile genius—very versatile and original. Look at me—I'm a top—tip-top," and with this the gentleman in the tweed suit seized the walking-stick in both hands, and holding it horizontally across his body, spun round and round with an inconceivable rapidity upon his toes.

Whilst the top was still spinning, the sound of footsteps caused Sumner to look around. A slight and not unpleasing figure, quietly dressed in black, came up the path. The top had by now ceased to spin and was looking foolish and a little frightened.

"Milady wants to speak to you," said the figure in black, with a strong Gallic accent.

"Yes, yes—I will go along at once," said the erstwhile sundial—and without any word to Sumner, he went off at a very furious pace.

The Frenchwoman gazed after the hurrying figure in obvious disapprobation.

"Quel ménage," she ejaculated, *"c'est une véritable maison de santé—cette maison-ci.* I do not stay, *moi—mais non. Je donne ma démission, aujourd'hui même. J'en ai par dessus la tête . . .* ah, I pray your pardon. . . . I did not zee Monsieur."

"Mademoiselle," said Matthew Sumner, bowing with an old-fashioned courtesy, *"croyez bien, que je suis votre humble serviteur."*

Mademoiselle was delighted, overjoyed, at hearing her own language—surely Monsieur was a compatriot—*mais non, vraiment?* She could not believe it; Monsieur's accent was the true Parisian—no Englishman could speak like

that—brave people, but savage (*barbare*). Monsieur was doubtless of French extraction. It was so sad here: hers—could he doubt it?—was *"un métier pitoyable."* Yes, she was the *confidente* of Madame: but she was going back to Paris. They were all mad, these English—she begged Monsieur's pardon: but he would understand what she meant: he had *"un caractère sympathique"*—he was *"si gentil, si spirituel."*

"Is Sir Hugh always as mad as that?" Sumner had asked, striving to stem the tide of panegyric.

"Sare 'Ugh? Hein? C'n'est pas Sare 'Ugh, ce type-là. C'est le carabin!"

"Le docteur? Le monsieur qui est parti?"

"Mais oui: Monsieur le docteur, si vous voulez. Bah, il n'est qu'un carabin, beaucoup plus fou que l'autre. J'ne sais pas c'que j'fais dans cette galère: je ne tiens pas à devenir folle, moi. Alors! demain, je donnerai ma démission. Eh, bien, Monsieur; je dis adieu: je dois faut partir."

With a half courtesy, the which any of the women guests on the lawns would have envied in silence, and a glance they would have deplored aloud, Lady Flayne's companion turned and hurried back towards the house with a rustle of silk petticoat beneath the black voile skirt that even an Anglican sense of fitness had failed altogether to silence.

Mr. Matthew Sumner made his way back to the crowded part of the gardens and on towards the gates of Stappham Old Place like a man in a dream. He omitted to say goodbye to Lady Flayne. He was a man of an equable temper, who never swore: nevertheless, I am bound to record the fact that upon being waylaid on his way out and importuned to buy a three-halfpenny imitation primrose at half-a-crown in behalf of a good cause, he told the Duchess of Fotheringay to go to hell.

CHAPTER V: THE FACETIÆ OF PROFESSOR PHIPPS

IT was one of those days in late autumn when the sun seems to have made up his mind to do a little more than his duty to mankind; as though he were remorseful for cold and windy days in spring and dull days in summer and so many wet Sundays and all the rain in August, and anxious to show what might be done in the way of sunshine before winter and bad weather had it all their own way.

All day the sun had blazed out of a cloudless sky, and the air was free even of the faintest wisp of autumnal mist, and it seemed that summer had come again in pomp and meant to stay for all time. About six o'clock in the evening, when the sun, bigger and redder than ever, was thinking of going to bed among the chimney-pots of Knightsbridge, Mr. Matthew Sumner was walking along a mean and narrow street on the edge of Soho. The street ran east and west and the sun shone into it and along it between the high and narrow houses, drowning everything in a bath of golden light; washing out all shadows, like the head-lights of a great car turned suddenly down between two high hedgerows of a long and straight lane. Matthew Sumner walked slowly westward into the sun. The street, in shadow, had been mean and sordid and unclean. But the sun, like the alchemist's stone, is a great transmuter. The dust, which lay here and there in untidy little heaps beside the curbstone, was no longer dust, but gold-dust. The soiled advertisement sheets of a Sunday paper, thrown down beside a doorstep, were no longer of cheap paper, printed with coarse type and dirtied by the feet of passers-by, but leaf of gold beaten fine. A

faded red-stuff curtain in a window flamed out like a Crusader's banner. A little way up the street was a coster's barrow, and the coster, though doubtless himself but a poor man, was selling balls of red gold and ingots of pale yellow gold and a pyramid of great flaming rubies as large as tomatoes, and around his neck he wore a blue silk kerchief studded with stars. A cat slunk across the street—a dirty tortoise-shell cat with the mange, bent upon Heaven knows what unsavoury errand, but to Sumner he seemed a black and gold tiger with eyes of chrysoprase—a tiger burning bright whose fearful symmetry only an immortal hand or eye had framed.

Some self-respecting householder had polished the brass handle of his door that morning, and now it was a star in the street—or rather, a sun, as stars are said to be. A hoarding, which advertised an anti-bilious pill, had become a million poppies in a cornfield, and an enterprising firm seemed to have borrowed a Titian from the National Gallery to puff a dental cream. Mr. Matthew Sumner walked on against the sun through all this splendour, and his step grew firmer and his heart lighter and his brain more clear. Sumner was no chorister and he rarely, if ever, sang, except in his bath, but in spite of knowing that his voice was almost always more than a semitone out of tune, he, being alone where he walked in the middle of the street, and a little drunk with all this beauty, began to sing. Some childish memory seemed to have seized him, for he began:—

"'All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.'"

And then, almost without being aware of departing from the orthodox text, he began to improvise:—

"The painted flowers: the gilded fruit,
Upon the coster's stall:
The jolly, bright red chimney-pots,
The Lord God made them all.

"The window ledge all marble white;
The knocker on the door,
The gallant, flaming pillar-box,
The laughter of the poor.

"The bottles in the chemist's shop;
The Gentiles and the Jews:
The intrepid boys on bicycles
Who sell the *Evening News*.

"The lamp-posts, topped with crystal panes,
Red in the sunset flare;
The silken ropes and ruby lamps
That mark 'No thoroughfare.'

"The posters, all so richly dight,
The policeman, straight and tall;
All the brave things in London Town—
The Lord God made them all."

He walked on for a few yards in silence, and then began to sing softly the most inspiring and the most pagan and the most sublime of the Anglican hymns:—

"'O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come——'"

He walked now on through the sunlight with something of a martial stride.

"'Beneath the shadow of Thy Throne
Thy Saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine Arm alone,
And our defence is sure.'"

He passed the little French restaurant with its three very green trees in three very white tubs before its doors, and there was Auguste standing in the doorway, flourishing a large white napkin in one hand and giving his moustaches an extra twirl with the other, blinking in the sunlight and smiling and asking himself why the sun did not shine like this a little more often in *ce triste pays*—and he wished Monsieur a good-day out of the largeness

of his heart, and Monsieur stopped his song shamelessly in the middle of a verse to reply suitably, and then, when he had passed on, continued:

"'Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the Same.

'A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.'"

This verse, being the one he liked best, Mr. Matthew Sumner was about to repeat, when he almost ran into a figure that came out of a little newspaper shop in a kind of hurried shuffle. It was the figure of a very aged man, wrapped, although it was a warm day, in a heavy black and rather shabby frieze coat. The old man turned sharply to see who it was walking so nearly behind him, and Matthew Sumner, who rarely remembered a face, knew that he would not readily forget this one. A large and fleshy nose supported a pair of round, tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles, such as are affected by earnest War Office officials. A mane of dirty white hair escaped around the edges of a shapeless, black felt hat, and a muffler of brown wool bulged out between the old man's neck and his coat collar in an uneven fashion. A goat-like beard of the same dirty white as his hair stuck out from his chin; and as he opened his mouth to speak Sumner saw that there remained in his large, loose mouth but two or three stained and yellow teeth.

So suddenly and in such a startled manner had the old man turned, that the book which he had held clutched in his right hand fell on to the pavement.

"Why don't you look where you are going, sir?" said the old man, very petulantly.

Matthew Sumner muttered some apology and, picking up the book that lay on the ground, handed it to the old

man. He noticed with surprise that it was a cheap paper-backed edition of Pierre Louÿs' *Aphrodite;* and in handing it back to the old man, the pages flew open and a picture postcard fluttered out. Sumner retrieved the postcard, that had sailed off into the roadway, and he saw that it was of a kind that is specially imported into England and sold over obscure counters to trusted clients who conform to a prescribed ritual in the buying of them. The old man snatched the postcard from Sumner, and shaking with senile rage, cursed him for a clumsy, inquisitive and a worthless fellow. Flourishing his black ebony stick, and with half-spoken curses still on his lips, he set off down the street at an almost incredible pace for one so old.

Mr. Matthew Sumner turned, mechanically, into the newspaper shop. The rough counter was ranged with the common and more vulgar French journals: *Le Sourire, Pêle-Mêle, Le Rire,* and so forth—and a few of the cheapest and least reputable of the English comic papers. Bookshelves at the back of the shop bore copies of paper-backed octavo volumes such as Brantôme's *Dames Galantes,* the *Heptameron,* French editions of Poggio and the *Decameron,* the works of Louys, de Maupassant and Champsaur, and books by anonymities with such titles as *La gouvernante, Seize Ans, La Petite Dactylo,* and so forth. An enormously fat woman stood behind the counter. She was still staring after the old man who had gone out, and muttering aloud: *"Ah! je n'aime pas ce type-là: c'est un sale type—un vieux cochon. Mais une balle est une balle —et—il faut vivre! Hein! Eh, Monsieur?"*

Matthew Sumner bought the *Petit Parisien* and hurried out into the street. The sun had already sunk a few inches behind the distant houses at the street's end whilst Matthew Sumner had been in the newspaper shop, and now, in a few yards, he was walking in shadow. It may have been this that made the street, which had been paved with gold a moment since, mean and unclean in the eyes of Sumner: it may have been a disgust born in the pornographic bookshop: it may have been the inevitable reaction

after marching through bright sunlight, singing of God's "might, majesty and dominion"; but Matthew Sumner put it down to the old man with the ebony cane and the unkempt beard that he now hurried along, heedlessly disarranging a game of shove-halfpenny played by three small children on the pavement, out of joint with humanity and unable to finish the hymn in praise of God that he had begun. In an uncommonly short space of time, Matthew Sumner had taken a furious dislike to a fellow-being, and he hoped very fervently in his heart never to meet him again.

It is commonly said to-day that the Café Gaspard is not what it was. This, indeed, is said of almost all institutions by any critic over forty years of age, but in point of fact it is quite true about the Café Gaspard. Gaspard himself is long since dead, and a public company has inherited the premises and the name. It was once the haunt of painters, and it was said that Joseph Bunt had been used to pay his reckoning not infrequently with a pencil and a sheet of note-paper. Be this as it may, the Café Gaspard to-day conforms to the new order. A certain number of young poets and painters are still to be found sitting at its tables in front of black coffee or vermouth-cassis, but rather, it may be imagined, in respect to a tradition than for any advantage received: embryo geniuses more often resort to places that are cheaper, less pretentious and certainly less noisy.

Mr. Matthew Sumner was gently propelled past the commissionaire and through the revolving doors of the Café Gaspard by Nicholas Swain (in Gaspard's time there had been no commissionaire and no rotating doors), and shepherded to a small table at the end of a long red plush settee. A few moments later Henri set two bocks before them and Matthew Sumner, between intermittent sips at the beer, looked curiously about him. The Café was crowded. Sumner had never been in the Café Gaspard before, and, remembering the tradition, he gazed

with considerable interest and a little awe at the occupants of the other tables. Among those who sat around him, drinking, it must be confessed, chiefly whiskeys and soda, might well be the Joseph Bunts and the Wilfred Ommertons of to-morrow. A number of young men with long hair and loose ties he assumed (incorrectly) to be artists, and half-a-dozen pretty girls with "bobbed" hair who sat with them he assumed (equally incorrectly) to be models. The big man in a green velveteen jacket and a jungle of a brown beard who scribbed continually on a back of a postcard was not the poet that Mr. Matthew Sumner supposed him to be, but the proprietor of the largest hair-dressing establishment in the West End; and the aged scholar in the corner with the silver hair and a profile like a Roman cameo, was no scholar, but a sleeping partner in a boot and shoe store. Probably the only notable artist in the Café was Isidore Aurillac, the notorious leader of the "Ellipticists," who sat drinking stout in a great hurry and who looked so like a bank clerk that Matthew Sumner failed to see him at all.

Meanwhile Nicholas Swain was busily talking of himself: his ambitions with a big "A" and art with a somewhat smaller "A"; for Mr. Nicholas Swain was particularly anxious to sell a picture. So the talk ran on colour values and nuances and the Philistines and the bourgeois academy and venal critics—but in spite of so much eloquence Nicholas Swain never sold that picture.

Mr. Matthew Sumner, having surveyed the part of the room immediately before him, turned half round in his seat to see the half of the room behind him. As he did so, he saw a figure sitting a few tables away drinking a glass of Vichy water. There was no mistaking that untidy mop of dirty white hair; the large fleshy face; the tortoiseshell spectacles; the goatee beard. With a muttered exclamation, Matthew Sumner jumped up and almost ran out of the Café Gaspard, leaving Nicholas Swain to finish a diatribe against Mr. Collins Baker to a square yard or so of red plush. Matthew Sumner breathed in

the fresh air outside in great gulps and, hailing a 'bus, climbed up on to the top of it, as though anxious to free himself from an infection by swift propulsion through the upper air. Had an airplane been by as he came out of the Café he would undoubtedly have climbed into it.

In the Café Gaspard, Nicholas Swain, instead of selling a picture, paid (with something of a sigh) for the two bocks of beer, and the old man with the tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles dissolved a digestive tabloid in another glass of Vichy water.

The habit (or disease) of collecting things is common to a large number of people: and though the variety of objects collected is almost infinite, the basic impulse is the same in all collectors. The lepidopterist may think the sticking of postage stamps in an album rather a poor occupation, and the philatelist would no doubt regard the climbing of suburban lamp-posts as an insane undertaking. An array of tram-tickets has delighted the hearts of grown-up schoolboys, and the *hortus siccus* brought an element of adventure into the routine of uneventful lives. Reputable citizens have committed dishonourable actions for the sake of duodecimos, and the love of book-plates has caused an infringement of the decalogue in the most apostolic of men. For it is to be noted that although the choice of the thing collected may be temperamental and particular, the common joy in success which outweighs the tedium of so many failures is the joyous adventure of the chase and the heritage of all men. Æsthetic plays a second fiddle in this business, and the butterfly is not cherished because it is beautiful, but because it is rare; the typography, it must be confessed, of some of the most sought-after editions is unlovely to look at and uneasy to read: and if the bibliophile leaves the pages of so many of his tomes uncut he may meet the charge in the words of M. Anatole France, *"Et vous, mangez-vous dans votre vieille faïence?"*

It is not beauty nor utility nor erudition which stimulates the collector: it is the chase. Don Juan may seem

to have little in common with Dr. Gumph or the Bishop of Beminster, yet it is the thousand to one chance that is a lure to all, and the surrender of the village maiden (I imagine) is more to Juan than kisses on the lips of Lesbia.

With Mr. Matthew Sumner it was early printed books. There were few bookshops in London with the dark corners of which he was unfamiliar: his knowledge of Paris was particular, and he could have found his way from the Quai d'Orsay to the Odéon by a score of different routes with his eyes bandaged. Once in Arles, once in Palermo, once in Castille and once in Great Tichfield Street had come to him the supreme moment that a Cortez or a Livingstone might have envied, whilst the most remembered adventure of his life was connected with the penny-box.

Although he was neither a widely-read man nor a competent scholar, yet his knowledge of some of the byways of bibliography was by no means small, and, indeed, he had contributed, more than once, theses in the Proceedings of a learned society upon the bibliography of obscure Latinists. It was on account of the last of them—an essay on Pamphylus Maurilianus, that he was now on his way to one of the elder Universities at the invitation of no less a scholar than Professor Phipps.

The hall of St. Mark's College is too well known to need any description: it is enough to remark upon its ceiling: the great fire-place: the famous panelling: and the portrait of its founder. Mr. Matthew Sumner sat at the high table at the right hand of Professor Phipps, the Master; and even the port—which is spoken of with respect in other colleges—failed to minister to his ease. It was not because he feared that the Master would in any way recognize in his guest a chance acquaintance of the street. His age and his extreme short-sightedness—even when aided by the tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles with the convex lenses—precluded any such chance: but Sumner was miserable in being the guest of a man whom, since he had

bumped into him outside a newspaper shop in Soho, he had come to hate like the devil.

It was, perhaps, as well that the Master was more ready to talk than to listen, for Matthew Sumner was quite incapable of talking on anything; but an occasional "yes" or "indeed" was enough for the loquacity of Professor Phipps. A dissertation upon the after-dinner customs of the late Empire, based on the evidence of Petronius, had occupied nearly twenty minutes and might have been excused in the mouth of a young don after his third glass of port, but Professor Phipps, who was in his eighty-seventh year, had begun it with the claret. With the coming of the port, however, the Master, to Sumner's intense relief, left the classics for a while to themselves: but Sumner's relief was short-lived. Bending a little towards his guest, Professor Phipps began in what he supposed to be an undertone, but which could almost have been overheard by anyone at the far end of the table: for like so many deaf people, the Master had no notion of how loudly he spoke.

"You see the man at the end of the table, on my left?"

"I do."

"That's Dr. Pottlebury: Pottlebury is the greatest living authority on the Apocrypha."

Sumner looked with interest at the authority on the Apocrypha, who was a mean-looking little man with pale blue eyes, a round head circled with untidy tufts of grey hair, and a weak mouth. He was clean-shaven and had just removed from his nose a pair of tinted glasses, and was carefully measuring a few drops of some tonic from a phial into a port-wine glass of water.

"He's a gay dog," continued the Professor—"he, he—a gay dog: but young men will be young men" (Dr. Pottlebury was sixty-three years old, and, needless to say, had always led a blameless life). "I mustn't tell you what I once found in his room—ha, ha—I never talk scandal; but I hushed the matter up—for the sake of the college. But there, these young men . . ."

Matthew Sumner, who was in a fever lest the eminent commentator on the Apocrypha should hear what was being said about him, broke in with a word in praise of the port.

"Yes," said Professor Phipps, "we're very proud of it: there is none like it elsewhere. But it won't last for ever—not the way some drink at this table. There's Professor Westerner, further along there on my right—I'll swear that's his third glass already: then he goes and soaks in his rooms afterwards. Cummings, his servant, puts him to bed most nights: but then Cummings is discreet: a college servant of the old school: a very discreet man: been here since he was a boy: his father—he, he—his *reputed* father, was one of the college servants. Ah, I daresay Cummings could tell me things even *I* don't know! But it's not drinking at night that I mind. It is no business of anybody else's what a man does once he's sported his oak. There was old Bodlingham, who was senior tutor here, he used to keep his staircase awake half the night when he had delirium tremens: that, of course, is being a nuisance. Then there was Jauncy—I've seen him so drunk at eleven o'clock in the morning that he had to be helped into the Rostrum and started off with a quotation from Polycarp (he was lecturer in exegetical criticism) by a junior fellow of his college. Many a time he and I have sat the night out together, bottle by bottle: but I can't do it now—he, he—not now: not that, nor other things: my constitution is not what it was: I can't touch port now."

Professor Phipps shook his head sorrowfully, and, after a sip of water, continued:—

"Yes, to be sure, it has not always been possible—some have had to go: one must observe the proprieties. There was Maddon, who married his cook: an excellent woman, I believe, but—he, he—he needn't have *married* her; and then—the late Dean, a dear fellow: he and I were great friends: his anecdotes have never been equalled: but he was indiscreet, though I think it was quite needless for Crump to take the action he did—after all, to my certain

knowledge there were three daughters: but there's no discipline to-day among the lower classes. But we must march with the times. In happier days we might have kept Olgen: he was the best organist we ever had: his rendering of Bach was masterly: but then, you know—he, he—the artistic temperament and—ha, ha—no doubt there are temptations. Then there was Craddock, poor Craddock—he was not popular in the college: but I must say I miss him: a congenial, sympathetic spirit. He was treated shamefully—shamefully, sir. I would have used my authority and insisted on his staying, but—he, he—it was a bit difficult for me—he, he—you understand; perhaps one has not always been—ha, ha—one was young once—he, he . . ." And the Master of St. Mark's College leered in the face of Mr. Matthew Sumner, wagging his head until the fringe of dirty white hair tossed about like tall grasses in a wind, chuckling indecently, somewhere at the back of his throat, until Matthew Sumner wished himself anywhere but where he now was.

After choking slightly and drinking a little cold water, Professor Phipps began again:—

"Yes, I was talking about Craddock. It was all owing to those miserable women. Summerton and Garfield are well enough as girls' schools—we couldn't do without girls' schools—he, he! I remember once in my undergraduate days—but perhaps I had better tell you that story in the Lodge. What I was going to say was, that the authorities should never have permitted those women to attend the University lectures: and the Byzantine period has its pitfalls. "Ἀναπεπτωκυῖά τε ἐν τῷ ἐδάφει ὑπτιά ἐκεῖτο. Θῆτες δέ τινες. . . ." you remember Gibbon's prelate?—but he should have kept to the Greek. Poor Craddock! I believe he now holds some chair in one of the commercial Universities."

Sumner made, or strove to make, sympathetic noises in respect to the fate of the ex-lecturer in Byzantine history, and then, in an attempt to interrupt the personalia of his host, began in praise of the silver on the table.

"We have some fine plate still," said the Professor, "but, unhappily, some of the best pieces have gone."

"It seems a great pity to have sold . . ."

"No, no. Of course, we would never have dreamed of *selling* anything. They were taken by Dr. Kinelly-Jones. I know he was heavily in debt, but it was *not* a gentlemanly action: I believe he is now doing quite well in Equador: but he was a droll fellow in his way. Well—shall we go into the Lodge?"

In the Lodge library the Master took his accustomed chair by the fire—for the nights were already growing chilly—and, having waved Sumner into a chair on his right and close against his own, began to tell of the senior tutor between sips from a glass of lemon and hot water, just coloured with a little brandy.

"Of course, I could not tell you in hall, because he was sitting next to me, but that was Farlingham, the senior tutor: a good soul and an authority on Middle English. He *very* nearly had to leave us, but happily it never came into the Courts—or the newspapers—though one of the cheaper papers had a small paragraph (with fortunately a wrong name), and eventually he—er—*compounded* is the legal phrase, I believe—for the sum of £200. I opened a little subscription list—to help the—now what was it?—oh, I remember, the Zenana Mission—and that, together with the proceeds of a jumble sale, made up the sum stipulated by the father. A perfect shark, my dear sir: he was aided, I believe, by some shady solicitor. Well, well, it all turned out all right in the end; but it was a severe shock for poor Farlingham—and it even gave *me* quite a fright—one has—he, he—to be so careful nowadays. But I promised to tell you a story of my undergraduate days."

There are few things harder to bear than garrulity in the aged: and when that garrulity takes the form of recounting, with a senile salaciousness, youthful improprieties, one might easily be forgiven a little impatience. Matthew Sumner, however, was in the painful position of a guest—a guest, moreover, who had been, in other

respects, well and hospitably entertained, and, willy-nilly, he had to listen to the facetiæ of Professor Phipps.

The library in the Master's lodge was a long low room, buttressed with books. Heavy beams of dark and aged oak supported the ceiling, and leaded casements opened out on to the cloistered quiet of Merran's Court. One or two electric lights, heavily shaded, filled the library with a subdued and mellow light. A rich and soft Turkey carpet silenced the footfall of the peripatetic. A ponderous table of black walnut stood in the middle of the room, in the centre of which, upon a small wooden plinth, stood a shallow Etruscan bowl, ornamented with Bacchic figures; a unique example of the period, which, as Professor Phipps explained to his guest, properly belonged to the *Camera secreta* of the National Museum in Naples. The Master, having poured out a glass of old brandy and placed it upon a small table of oriental workmanship beside his guest's chair in front of the fire, was now once again recounting remembered episodes, which, thought Mr. Matthew Sumner, any man of mature years might very decently have forgotten. To escape these narratives, Sumner interrupted to discourse on Pamphylus Maurilianus. This author was known to the Professor only by name: and he was particularly desirous of seeing the copy that Sumner had acquired. He made him promise to send the copy for him to see—and from this, turning to other writers of the same epoch, the Master led his guest over to the book-shelves to show him some prized editions. Sumner joined him at the book-shelves, and with the enthusiasm of a book-lover handled volume after volume, following slowly after the Professor from book-case to book-case.

It is commonly said that the true index to a man's mind is his library: this was particularly so in the case of Professor Phipps. Never before had Matthew Sumner seen so complete and varied a collection of facetiæ, erotica and the least reputable (if not always the most obscure) of Greek and Latin authors.

There were, of course, such standard works as the *Decameron* (including the Giunta edition of 1527, which made Sumner feel very envious), Burton's *Nights,* the *Facetiæ* of Poggio, the works of Aretino, various editions of Ovid, Petronius Arbiter, Propertius, Apuleius, Ausonius, Meursius, Suetonius, and so forth. Here was the Paris edition of 1715 of the *Menagiana* and Alemannus' *Procopius:* there the *Ducento Novelle* of Malespini and the *Chronique Scandaleuse* of the ninth Charles. Johannes Secundus, with some editions of the sixteenth-century French translations, lay a little to the left: and further along on the same shelf, a 1661 edition of the *Historæ Augustæ.* Here again were editions of Aristænetus and Athenæus: Heliodorus, Photius, Iamblichus, Athenagoras, Eustathius, Prodromus, Achilles Tatius and a host of obscure and obscene Latinists. The Professor—not unlike a large and disreputable moth—fluttered from book to book and from shelf to shelf, entertaining his guest with a running commentary upon his beloved authors. After having gone the rounds of the lower shelves, the Master hobbled over to a pair of library steps, and, having placed them, with the help of Matthew Sumner, before one of the taller book-cases, proceeded painfully to climb them.

"I keep my most interesting books on the top shelves," said the Professor, leering down upon the unhappy Sumner, who was steadying the steps; "my servant—he, he—might read a little while I am out of the room—he, he. There are some English books up there—he, he—suppressed editions: some of them are very valuable: they'll amuse you: there's a large quarto edition of Biffen, printed privately in Paris in '85, *with the plates*—I'll get it down to show you." And with a coquettish wagging of the head, the aged Master clambered higher up the steps. Standing on the topmost step—for the steps were short—Professor Phipps, swaying a little to and fro, pulled with both hands at a heavy quarto volume in the top shelf.

If so humane a body as Mr. Matthew Sumner ever felt

that the killing of a fellow man might be not only excusable, but even a meritorious action, he felt it now, as he stood in the gloomy library, looking up at the aged satyr on the top of the library steps. It would be so easy and so sane and so just to give those steps a slight push and send the Master of St. Mark's College crashing to the floor. Some such thought as this passed through Matthew Sumner's brain, when the book at which the Professor was pulling suddenly came out from between the other books, and the Master, losing his balance, swayed giddily for a moment, and then—before Matthew Sumner could make any movement to help—himself and the Master, the library steps, the remains of an oriental table and the works of the estimable Biffen lay in a disordered heap on the Turkey carpet.

With the help of Jenkins, the master's servant, the insensible form of Professor Phipps was carried into the bedroom and, a doctor having been sent for, Matthew Sumner only awaited his arrival before going to the rooms on H staircase which had been put at his disposal by his host. There Sumner passed a sleepless night, tossing to and fro in his narrow bed, and asking himself whether or no he had himself shaken the frail eminence upon which the Professor had stood: reproaching himself for his thoughts against his host, who had shown him a lavish hospitality, however it may have been seasoned against his peculiar taste: laying upon his conscience the hatred against an old man, who was doubtless about to die—if not already dead at this hour of night; debating if, after all, a senile indulgence in a taste for scandal and a certain impropriety of mind were grave faults in a world very full of defects: and yet, all the while, hoping in his heart that the Master of St. Mark's was dead; and miserable in the knowledge that dead or alive he never wished to see that aged scholar again.

He fell asleep just before dawn, to be troubled by uneasy dreams, and to be awakened a few hours later by the bright sunshine that streamed through his open

window. He lay there in the sunlight, recalling the incidents of the night before until the scout brought him a cup of tea and some slices of bread and butter.

"The doctor," said the scout, "says the Master's condition is serious."

"Is he conscious?" Sumner had asked.

"Yes, sir; but 'e is 'ardly 'imself, sir. 'E has been delirious, I believe; and Dr. Scott, 'e told me to tell you that the Master 'as been asking for you, and will you please see him as soon as you 'ave 'ad your breakfast?"

The scout went out quietly, closing the door softly behind him, while Sumner turned over with his back to the sunshine and wished more fiercely than ever that his host was dead.

In the Professor's bedroom was the doctor, a clean-shaven, alert-looking man of some forty years of age, wearing a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez, and a rotund little man with a bald head and a clerical collar, in whom Matthew Sumner recognized the Dean.

Lying in bed, with his dirty white hair lying in a disorder on the pillow and with his shrunken fingers picking at the counterpane, Professor Phipps seemed to Matthew Sumner more repellent than ever. His eyes were bright and feverish, which contrasted with the pallor of his cheeks, and it was clear, even to an untrained observer, that the Master had not long to live. As soon as Matthew Sumner came into the room, he waved a shaking finger towards him.

"I want to see the Pamphylus," he began in a weak voice, but with a feverish insistence; "I must see the Pamphylus: I've never read him. I may find something—he, he—you never know—a phrase, maybe a word even—*'dignamque auribus et tuo cachinno . . . modo pupulum . . .'* That was it, wasn't it?—he, he—my memory isn't what it was—something I don't know—*'ille lento parebat imperio, puellaque . . .'* Yes, yes—there is the passage in Pico—*'O figliuola mia, questo è il*

Diavolo. . . .' No, that is not Pico—he, he . . . but for me; the Sirmian lyre:—

> *"'Mellitos oculos tuos, Iuventi,*
> *siquis me sinat usque basiare . . .'*

But I grow old, Cephalus—old: an old man. And long long since—*'Que voulez-vous, elles se retiraient. . . . bredouilles . . . bredouilles . . . bredouilles!"* And now:—

> *"''Tis but the bagatelle that might have been:*
> *Lucietta, Franzosata, Tullia . . .*
> *All phantom figures on a phantom screen!'*

He, he — I remember — Marcelle her name was— he, he . . ."

At this point the reminiscences of Professor Phipps were left still-born upon his lips by the indignation of the Dean.

"Dr. Phipps—I beg of you—is this seemly? You are an old man: you are—it is my duty to tell you so—I cannot—I dare not—be false to my office—about to leave the vanities of this world and all earthly frailty to appear before Him to whom all hearts are open and all desires known. Is this a time to talk of chambering and wantonness? Rather . . ."

The aged Master had dragged himself up into almost a sitting posture in bed while the Dean was speaking, and he interrupted the homily of that worthy and sincere man, glaring at him with fiery eyes, his very beard bristling with anger:—

"Turn that old humbug out. If I'm dying, I'm damned if I'll have him in the room."

The Professor sank back exhausted upon the pillow as the door closed behind the back of the priest.

"I won't die," he muttered, in a weak and querulous voice—"I don't want to die yet. And I have done nothing: and when I am dead I can do nothing—I shall

go down into the dark—darkness—to remember nothing—as the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is not. Ha, ha—that's what that damned priest would have said to me—me! and in '79, if it hadn't been for me—he, he—it was the Babylonian woman then: he was well out of that affair. And I'm dying, am I? I won't . . . I won't . . . I won't . . ."

The Master's voice had risen to a screech and he now lay breathing in quick gasps, his hands trembling upon the counterpane. Matthew Sumner was about to steal softly from the room, when the Professor began to speak again:—

"I have wasted my life—wasted it for more than sixty years: and now it is too late. You, sir—I can't see who you are—but, I tell you; enjoy life while you can—while you are yet young—he, he—I daresay I could tell you what to do—he, he . . . but I am old: I am dying—no, no, I won't die: not yet—what did Solomon say? 'Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.' That is true—weariness of the flesh: I wasted my youth in much study: to do what? To be what? And I did nothing: I was afraid—I have always been afraid—of repute among men: of accidents and disease—and I refrained. Never—never—never have I enjoyed the sweet fruits: only once, when I was very young: a young man . . . I might have . . . She was only nineteen, 'shy as the squirrel' . . . and I did nothing. I was afraid: I wanted to: I did nothing, and I went away. Always I have desired—and gone away: and I am now Master: and I am dying—filled with regret. Ha, ha—what might I not have done?—with the knowledge I have now, were I young again —*'devolæ flavi verticis exuviæ'*—but I'm dying: I should like to have seen the Pamphylus . . . I should like to . . . perhaps, even yet . . . I know nothing: it seems a blackness . . . Cardayne of Seddon went over to Islam . . . he, he . . . Cardayne, that was: they said . . . said . . ."

The old man's voice had grown weaker and weaker, and it trailed away into a whisper and became inaudible. There was silence for a minute, and the dying man's hands on the counterpane ceased to twitch and his breathing grew very quiet and still. He had closed his eyes, but presently he opened them and, speaking in a clearer tone than he had used as yet, said:—

"Who is that?"

"It is Mr. Sumner, your guest," said Dr. Scott, "he was with you last night . . ."

"I remember: he has a Pamphylus: I shall never see it. Mr. Sumner, come here." And Professor Phipps motioned his guest to the bedside.

"Bend down," continued the Professor, "I cannot speak out loud. That's Dr. Scott, there, who's attending me. Yes, yes—one must not believe all they say about him—but . . . he was very nearly struck off the register . . . and I have always said, if the husband had had a better counsel . . . but that was not all . . . there was . . ." The voice died away, and only the slight movement of his lips showed that the Master was still striving to speak. But he said no other word aloud and presently the lips ceased to move.

Matthew Sumner tiptoed to the door and went out without saying anything to Dr. Scott, who was bending over the body of the dead Master.

CHAPTER VI: THE JOYOUS ADVENTURE OF THE LADY AND THE SPONGE

THE sound of sobbing was audible: an intermittent and very pitiful noise. Sumner supposed that the bed in the next room must have been against the partition wall, as his was, and that the wall was thin and easily permeable to sounds. But such a slight noise as this could not have waked even a light sleeper, and Matthew Sumner had been lying watching the bright moonlight that flooded half the room for a quarter of an hour. There was a wind loose outside strong enough to blow about the feathery tops of some larches and by this means to make small shadows dance upon the bedroom carpet for the entertainment of the sleepless.

Not to sleep is to many people a martyrdom, but on this moonlight night Sumner had already slept several hours—he took the hour to be about two in the morning—and he lay in happy wakefulness, enjoying the common material comfort of a good bed; pleased with the moonlight and some odd fancies which stayed in his mind a moment and were gone; mellow after a pint of a good claret; and in health after a day's tramp on the sea-shore and these few hours' sleep unspoiled by any dreams.

But as he lay there awake trying to persuade some conceit to stay longer in his mind so that he might happily remember it in the morning, he wished heartily that the architect of the Hôtel Napoléon had been a little more solid in his walls. There are few things harder to put up with than the sound of a woman sobbing in the middle-night.

After some minutes the sobbing died away so as to be

almost inaudible, and Matthew Sumner was in the middle of trying to repeat to himself some lines the moonlight phantasies had recalled:—

> "'But were you at your window now,
> To look forth on the fairy sight
> Of your illumined haunts by night,
> To see the park-glades where you play
> Far lovelier than they are by day,
> To see . . . to see . . .'"

when his mind was turned away from this endeavour to remember how the poem went on, by the sound of a voice in the next room.

"What are we to do about it?" said the voice, a man's voice; and though it sounded hard and cruel, Sumner felt that it was neither the one nor the other, but merely the voice of one in pain. The sobbing grew louder, and a voice, full of entreaty and in most pitiful accents said:—

"He—he was so strong—so compelling: he compelled me against my will: I didn't know what I was doing: I was foolish—God knows how foolish I was . . . I . . . I . . ."

A renewed burst of sobbing broke down the sequence of speech. To listen to an intimate conversation, clearly not intended for the ears of others—a conversation, moreover, taking place between a man and a woman in the middle of the night—is not a creditable action in the listener. It was useless for Mr. Matthew Sumner to say to himself that he could not avoid overhearing what was said: he might have muffled his ears in the pillow and buried his head under the bed-clothes: he might, had this proved ineffectual, have dressed and gone out for an hour's walk in the moonlight on the sea-shore until it might have been expected that the talkers had fallen asleep. But he did neither of these things. He tried to smother the voice of conscience with some casuistic arguments: he asked himself, to begin with, why he should

penalize himself by being smothered in bed-clothes (it was a warm night) or if it was at all reasonable to be expected to become a night-walker (when he was already tired) because two indiscreet people, whom he did not know, talked too loudly. After all, he wasn't listening to what they said: it was not possible to help hearing them. And then, he recalled the evidence of Mrs. Cluppins:—

"And you listened, I believe, Mrs. Cluppins?"

"Beggin' your pardon, Sir, I would scorn the haction. The voices was very loud, Sir, and forced themselves upon my ear"—and this line of argument seemed all at once worthless. An unimaginative person might have thumped upon the wall and said that he wanted to go to sleep: but Matthew Sumner's modesty forbade such a course—and at last, like many better men, he compromised with his conscience to the extent of not trying too earnestly to hear what was not meant for his ears and by successfully resisting the temptation to lie on the side of the bed next to the wall so as to hear better.

For a while there was silence, broken only by an occasional sob, and Sumner had already begun to be both thankful at heart that he had no longer to play the ungenerous part of eavesdropper, and just (it may be) a little humanly disappointed as well, when the man spoke again:—

"I can't bear it, Mona—to think of you—with *him*. He . . . how could you? It's done me in—anyhow. To-morrow I . . ."

"Oh, Jumbo . . . You've never called me Mona before . . . not even when I let Poonah down on that jump . . . and when (amidst a crescendo of sobs) Clarice sent in her bill . . . and you looked ugly then—indeed you did—and frightened me; and I'm only a child . . . and he . . . Oh, how I hate him! I was mad, I tell you: Jumbo, dear Jumbo . . . you used to call me Kittles . . . Jumbo!"

"It's no good, Mona: I trusted you—and loved you—

God alone knows how I loved you and love you still. But you and he were together there as man and wife: oh, don't think I had you watched: it was altogether by accident that I learnt about it—that I know . . . and I would not have believed it, but Geoffrey said . . . and I half killed him for saying it . . . and then I came down . . . and *he* . . . he laughed, before he went away."

For a while the other speaker sobbed passionately without replying, and then, at length, between these sobs began to speak again brokenly:—

"Why did you go away and leave me? I thought—Heavens, I don't know what I thought—but you wouldn't come down—and I was all alone, and I'm young and foolish. Why did you make me love you: and marry me? I was only eighteen then—and that was only a year ago: I'm nineteen now—and a woman. Were you *very* wise at nineteen—old Jumbo? Can't you love me again—after this? He's gone—for ever . . . and I've learnt . . . I've learnt . . ."

"What have you learnt, Kittles? What I would you had never learnt. What now . . . ?"

"Oh, Jumbo. I have learnt what it is to love only one man—you. You—you—you. Jumbo, don't look at me like that . . . not like that. . . . You used to think I was beautiful once: at least, you said you thought I was . . . and you won't even touch me . . . and I want to be touched . . . by you."

"After him?"

"Jumbo . . . Can't you forgive? I never—I swear it—I never . . . Oh, how I hate myself . . . but dear, dear Jumbo . . . do you remember when you first kissed me—in the little wood of birches at the back of Gulmer's Farm? And how you said I kissed like a canary picking up a grain of seed . . . and you showed me how you wanted me to kiss you . . . and I was so happy, then. I had only just had my hair up and I let it all down, because you loved it so and wanted to see how long it

was: and now it's all short—bobbed at the shoulder—because you liked it done in the new fashion; and then—the next day how we walked to Ruan over the cliffs, and on the way, we climbed down to Boecchan Cave, and you said how brave I was . . . I was never so happy before or since. And then, on the way home, I sprained my ankle—do you remember?—on Polfechan Saddle, and you had to carry me home—poor old Jumbo—for nearly two miles: but I didn't weigh much, Jumbo: at least you *said* I didn't . . . and I've never loved anything so much in my life as that journey; although it took a long, long time to do it, because, old Jumbo, you would put me down every hundred yards to kiss me, 'cos you couldn't kiss much of me with little me flung over your shoulder like a sack of coals, could you? And that day when we got caught in the storm out on the moors and you took off your sweater and made me put it on to keep me warm although you shivered in your shirt all the way back—and I was so warm and happy wrapped up in *your* sweater. Oh, Jumbo . . . and all that was only a year ago . . . and you said you loved me ever since—foolish, mad me."

"Oh, Kittles, but why? . . . Why this—now . . . ?"

"Oh, but, don't you see, I was mad—insane—for the moment? Oh, Jumbo, haven't you sometimes wanted to do something dreadfully, frightfully, horribly wicked? Not because you wanted to do it . . . or thought you'd like doing it when you were doing it, but just because it was horribly, awfully wicked? In that great, big, solemn club of yours, haven't you sometimes wanted to go up to an archbishop who was reading the *Times* and gently set light to it with a match? And then they'd black-ball you, Jumbo? Oh, but I'm talking sillily. I am a child, and I talk like a child: you can never forgive me . . . never: I shall never forgive myself. You must go away and leave me and never, never, never see me again—Oh, Jumbo!"

For some little while the woman in the next room continued to sob brokenly and Sumner could only catch

a word here and there, hardly distinguishable amongst her lamentations.

"No—don't . . . don t . . . you . . . no — no, it's not, I say . . . and I . . . you mustn't touch me . . . I'm . . . Oh, Jumbo you must go—go away: you will get a divorce easily enough: I shan't—what do you call it?—contest it. And you must go right away and marry Jeanette—I *know* she wants to marry you—and forget about poor little me. But I won't go to that man: I *won't!* I'll go and live in a cottage by myself—all by myself in the country: I'll go to Ruan, where you met me first, and all day I'll imagine that nothing has happened and that you are coming over the hill to see me . . . as you used to, Jumbo. I'll only take Binkie with me, because he knew you when you first came to me and never barked at you and was never jealous when you wouldn't let him nuzzle me because a great big Jumbo-man wanted to nuzzle me himself . . . but simply sat a little way off and barked very loud so that we might know if any nasty humans were coming along.

"And when it rains I shall go out and moon over the moors, away inland, by the mere where we saw the otter among the alders, and I shall be so wet and such a poor bedraggled me with no big warm sweater to keep me a little dry . . . but perhaps you will lend me an old one to take away with me . . . and I'll take it to bed with me (when it's dry, I mean) like I used to Joshua the Golliwog when I was a child—but you never knew Joshua—and . . . and . . . I'm sure Jeanette won't mind me doing that—will she, Jumbo?"

"Kittles, Kittles . . . don't . . . I'm not going to marry Jeanette or any one. I'm not . . ."

"Oh, but, Jumbo—you can't live alone—you'll be miserable. My poor Jumbo . . ."

"Kittles, my darling—don't think I'm going away: I can't do without you: I can't live without you. What do I care for Hoxton or a hundred men? I can't understand . . . but it doesn't matter . . . it doesn't . . .

and I want you; oh, so badly! . . . No, let me . . . I must kiss you: I must . . ."

"Jumbo—you really mean that you can still love me—after this—madness . . . after . . . ? No, you can't: no man could: . . . I am damned: . . . degraded: . . . unclean . . ."

"But I can—I do . . . Kittles . . ."

"Listen to me, Jumbo. I was . . . I don't know what I was: but I loved you always—then . . . and now, and I love and have loved no one else, however mad I was. And if it be possible—because of this, my madness—I love you more than ever. Never, Jumbo, never—I swear it . . ."

"Kittles, let's forget all this ever happened—and be happy—just you and I; as of old."

"Jumbo, I swear—by all my gods . . . but I don't believe in any gods, Jumbo . . . you are the only god I know . . . so I shall swear by you. I swear, by Jumbo, my god, that never, never, never again shall I go mad: never shall I think or dream that such could be possible (but oh, Jumbo, I didn't dream of doing anything—I went mad suddenly—as if I had had a sunstroke—like Dingo did once), and my darling—never, never, never, never . . . by Jumbo, I swear it!"

"Kittles!"

"Jumbo, say I am forgiven—if you can?"

"I do . . . I do . . . and I forget: Kittles, I have forgotten—except that I love you!"

"Swear it!"

"I swear it—by Kittles—I swear it!"

"I can hardly believe it possible . . ."

"What?"

"That you still love me."

"Must I show you—by proof positive?"

"Jumbo . . . show me . . ."

Mr. Matthew Sumner—and two people whom he did not know, but who answered to the names of Kittles

and Jumbo—awoke to find the sun, where the moon had been a few hours earlier, plastering the floor with squares of gold. A sweet smell of pines blew in through the open window, and Sumner jumped out of bed in the best of tempers. If he felt a little ashamed of himself for having been so ready a listener over-night, he was glad to have been acquainted with the comfortable conclusion, and to know that two young people were not—as they might so easily have been—lying awake and unhappy upon so sunny a morning. He laughed a little to himself and walking across the sun-splashed floor to the window, flung it open to its fullest and thrust his head out into the fresh morning air. He laughed out loud into the sunshine.

Withdrawing his head into the room again, he retrieved his bedroom slippers from under the dressing-table, wrapped himself up in a jaeger dressing-gown, and suitably equipped, set out on a journey.

The Hôtel Napoléon is comfortable and its kitchen is beyond all praise, but the modern luxury of private bathrooms attached to each bedroom is not provided: the bathing accommodation is adequate, but situated at the far end of corridors.

Mr. Matthew Sumner tramped the length of one long corridor, and then, turning to the left and down a flight of half-a-dozen steps, to the end of another one, where he found the bath-room.

To wake up in a good humour is a great thing: so it is, also, to see the sun shine and to splash about in one's bath with sweet salt sea smells blowing in at the window. It has never yet been clearly explained why one should sing in one's bath: a theory of acoustics has been put forward in which the reverberatory properties of the metal basin are said to tempt choric endeavour: but a more probable theory is that one is happy while bathing and when one is happy one sings.

So Mr. Matthew Sumner splashed about happily and sang to a tune of his own making:—

" 'The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!'

"——All's right with the world!" repeated Matthew Sumner, an octave (or thereabouts) lower: and he splashed about in the water more mightily than ever.

A quarter of an hour later he came out of the bath-room into the corridor, holding his sponge and soap wrapped up in a bundle with his towel under his arm, and with his body in a glow underneath the jaeger dressing-gown and a song still trembling on his lips—so that out of the fullness of his heart he would have chanted even in this hotel corridor, had he not feared the chance of meeting some one or of disturbing late sleepers as he passed their doors.

As he came up the corridor and had almost reached the small flight of steps at the end, a figure appeared from around the farther corridor and stood a moment hesitant at the top of the half-a-dozen stairs. Matthew Sumner stopped involuntarily, frozen, as it were, into a momentary immobility at the sight of such loveliness. A flood of sunlight streaming in from a high casement on the right set fire to a golden aureole of hair that was cut neck-high, and which foamed and flamed in a wild disorder about an oval face that only Botticelli had ever had the vision to limn.

The slender figure, pausing irresolute on the topmost stair, was wrapped around in a loose silk kimono of a deep blue—the colour of the skies above Capri on a summer's day. This sky-blue background was embroidered with two or three large crescents in silver thread—one that curved in an arch from the left shoulder to the waist: one which began at the waist and disappeared in the folds that hung about the right leg: and to Sumner it seemed

that this maiden had won her way out of Paradise: with hair spun of sunshine and robed in a texture of the moons and sky.

She stood with a little wonder in her wide-open eyes and her lips half-parted. The kimono lay open at the throat and the perfect symmetry of her neck held Sumner in amaze. In her right hand, pressed to her breast, she held a large sponge of a pale yellow hue, that must have been nearly eighteen inches in diameter.

Suddenly, while Matthew Sumner was still staring stupidly and very rudely at her, she let go of the large sponge, which, falling on the edge of the first stair, bounded down the six steps and with the velocity that it had gained during the descent rolled to his feet, where he stood in the lower corridor.

Sumner stooped and picked up the sponge in order to hand it back to its owner, who had now come down the steps into the corridor. Close to him, he saw how lovely she was. She could hardly have been over twenty, and the slender grace of her body, manifest under the clinging folds of the kimono, and the youthful wonder in her face drove Sumner's wits to the winds and left him speechless and looking very foolish, standing there before this divinity in the white distempered corridor.

"Oh, thank you so much for bringing back to me my big sponge," she said, while the other was still trying to remember what to say. "It was so silly of me . . . I am a silly child and always dropping things," and she gave her head a little shake that made a million or more golden hairs dance around her neck till her head seemed set in a changing sea of flame.

Somewhere Sumner had heard that voice before—those caressing accents: and the lisp, which was not a lisp; and the childlike directness and the childlike appeal.

"Not at all," he murmured, stupidly, still striving to remember something. He held the sponge towards her.

Matthew Sumner never quite knew how it happened. She had stood before him with the edge of her kimono

held in her right hand, and now she lifted out the right hand to take the big sponge from him. It may have been that in thus releasing the garment, the weight of the material falling away drew the kimono apart, but in an instant Mr. Matthew Sumner found himself gazing at one of the fairest bodies ever fashioned by the Potter, gleaming whitely like a moon against the blue fabric, but very partly hidden by a big sponge clasped upon the right breast.

"Oh," cried the girl, and dropping the sponge, she gathered the folds of the kimono around her, "oh, do give me my big sponge again, please. I can't pick it up myself—'cos, you see . . . I mustn't let go my gown . . . Please put it under my arm—there."

Sumner carefully put the sponge under the girl's arm. With a little laugh and a backward glance, she hurried down the corridor. Matthew Sumner stood looking after her. Just outside the bath-room door the sponge slipped out from under her arm.

With a laughing glance at Sumner, she said:—

"Oh—I've dropped my big sponge again . . . you mustn't look this time."

Next moment she was in the bath-room and Mr. Matthew Sumner was walking towards his room like a man in a dream and still trying to remember something.

A large, grey car with a limousine body stood outside the hotel porch. A slender figure in a green-and-gold jumper stood at the door of the car. She was hatless, and Matthew Sumner, who was smoking his pipe in the porch, was unable to keep his eyes off that mop of silken hair and the little shadows on the neck beneath.

"How long will you be away? Hurry back . . . I shall be miserable—so awfully miserable without you . . . such a lonesome me."

"Only three days," said the man in the car.

"Good-bye, Jumbo," cried the girl as the car swung away.

Mr. Matthew Sumner remembered.

Automatically, he picked up the ball of green wool that the girl had dropped. She thanked him prettily:—

"But I am always dropping things. I could have got it myself . . . it's easier to pick up than a big sponge. Besides I've got a jumper on now: not a kimono . . . but perhaps you like me in a kimono better?" And with a little bubble of laughter she ran into the hotel.

"Q'est-ce que c'est que vous désirez, Monsieur?" asked the concierge.

"L'indicateur—et je partirai demain," said Mr. Matthew Sumner, a little brusquely.

CHAPTER VII: THE AMUSING EPISODE OF THE FIRST VIOLIN

THE swing doors of the Restaurant Govard swung open and let a gust of cold air into the heated lobby: they also let in Mr. Matthew Sumner. The Restaurant Govard is noisy and expensive: the cloak-room attendant, in a uniform which approximates to that of an officer in the brigade Guards, very properly insists on giving you a numbered ticket for your hat and coat: there is a place where you can wash your hands and a be-buttoned page will hand you a towel the size of a pocket-handkerchief, and remove an imaginary fly from your coat collar with a dissipated clothes-brush, for the sum of sixpence. The food is eatable—if you order your dinner beforehand: the champagne is drinkable—if you are willing to pay for it: the remaining wines on the list are either undrinkable or unprocurable. There is an orchestra consisting of two violins, a 'cello with a bald head and a baby grand that is usually out of tune. The cigars are not very much worse nor very much dearer than at other eating-places of the same class. The proprietor is fat: he wears a small waxed moustache, a gold watch-chain and long, not too white, starched cuffs. He was named Jacob by his parents, but is usually called George by young gentlemen with a superfluity of cash. The tables are too close to one another: there are not enough waiters: and there is a gallery where the amorous may escape notice. The Restaurant Govard is the last place in the world where one might have expected to find Matthew Sumner. But Sumner was one of those people who are always to be found in unexpected places: and, indeed, he looked a little out of place almost wherever he

happened to be. He looked at home at neither the Curio club nor the Carfax club: he belonged to a cat and dog club which affected Bohemianism in a cellar, where he looked more out of place than ever. He was a remarked figure at Monte Carlo and he was supposed to have a history in the Casino: he would have been equally conspicuous at a diaconal council. His was—if the phrase may be allowed—a conspicuous inconspicuosity.

But Matthew Sumner had a reason for going into the Restaurant Govard: it was, to be sure, a Matthew-Sumnerish reason. He slipped in through those too-easily-opened swing doors to avoid a friend. Had the hour been earlier he would probably have gone into a shop and bought something that he did not want. But it was half-past seven and the shops were closed. There was really no need on this occasion for him to penalize himself by eating a bad dinner in worse company merely to escape an uncongenial acquaintance. Any other man would, after a few words of greeting, have hurried away to keep an imaginary and very urgent appointment. But Sumner was incapable of this dexterity, and so a few minutes later he was threading his way between a number of crowded tables behind an agitated waiter.

The restaurant was very full, and Sumner, after a perambulation on the floor of the house, was at last provided with a seat in the gallery. He sat at a small table immediately behind a big man in evening dress, and was forgotten by the waiter. He looked around him. On his right was the wall: at his left elbow was the balustrade of the gallery, and looking over it and down he had a view—fore-shortened from above—of a number of uninteresting people eating too much. His fingers played with the salt-spoon and he had an almost irresistible desire to empty a little salt upon the shoulders of a large woman, whose corsage was designed more for a horizontal than for a bird's-eye inspection.

Resisting this temptation, Mr. Matthew Sumner looked at the big man in front of him. He was over six feet:

he was fat: he probably weighed sixteen stone. Little creases of fat rolled down from the back of his neck over the edge of his collar. He was partially bald, had a large fleshy nose and a double chin. He appeared to have ordered his dinner beforehand; to know the waiter by name; and to be a *persona grata* with the boss. He was not dining alone. Opposite him sat a girl dressed in red. She was very slender and looked a year or so over twenty. Her dark hair lay in a little cluster of curls around her small head. Her dress was of a clinging material of the colour of red rambler roses, and fell away from two narrow ribbons on the shoulders to meet in front somewhere below the level of the tablecloth and behind somewhere about the waist. She was smoking cigarettes, between courses, in a long ivory holder tipped with gold. A bottle of champagne in a bucket of ice stood at the side of the table, from which two glasses were being continually filled by an assiduous and servile waiter.

Matthew Sumner began to feel hungry, and, after several unsuccessful attempts, managed to stop the wrong waiter. About ten minutes later he found the right one, and, having ordered a *sole meunière* and an *omelette fine* to follow, looked at the wine list.

"I'll have half a Margaux," said Sumner.

"I am sorry, sare, there is not left," said the waiter.

After several bad starts, Sumner ordered a pint of a rather doubtful Beaune (it was called Corton on the list) and had it in time to drink with his coffee.

Now and again the orchestra played something—popular ragtime: selections from *Véronique:* the Barcarolle: and so forth. The playing was not quite so automatic as a penny-in-the-slot piano, but very nearly. Presently the musicians took a rest: one by one they left the balcony; the cellist bringing up the rear, wiping his neck and face in a generous manner with a very large handkerchief. Matthew Sumner was glad of the respite. The big man in front of him bawled for a waiter and directed that a bottle of champagne be sent to the orchestra. A little

later the first violin, a lean, cadaverous-looking, old-young man, with an elf-lock of pale yellow hair hanging limply across his forehead, came to say how much the orchestra appreciated the generosity. The large man waved the messenger away, blew a little cigar smoke into his face as he turned to go, and said lazily: "Aw well, perhaps you'll play something a little less vile later on." The thin girl laughed. While Matthew Sumner was waiting for his omelette, a waiter brought up a small folded note to the large man. The large man glanced at it, and cried:—

"Good God!"

"What is it?" asked the girl.

"It's from Melton—telephone message—Kobinsky no good for to-morrow night: he's gone off suddenly: message to say he won't be back till Friday: the Ekstein woman's at the bottom of it: too late to do anything now."

"Who's the Ekstein woman?" asked the girl in red.

The large man explained the moral character of the Ekstein woman in terms which made Matthew Sumner blush. The slim girl pouted and said:—

"I don't think you're very polite, Algy."

The man swore again—and enabled Matthew Sumner to overhear a commentary upon Kobinsky that would have formed excellent material for a libel action.

"However," he said at last, "there's damn all to be done now: and I'm not going to let that damn dago spoil my evening." He took another cigar from a long leather case and shouted for a Grand Marnier, Cordon Rouge. Sumner sipped at his coffee and wondered how long it would be before he got his bill. But a few minutes later he forgot all about going.

By all the theories of dramatic incidence: according to all the rules of cause and effect: in deference to poetic justice and a sentimental sense of the fitness of things, that noisy and ridiculous eating-place should have become stricken into silence as the vibrations of the strings of the first fiddle filled the room with sound. It would

be more agreeable to suppose something of this sort to have taken place, but to Matthew Sumner, almost holding his breath and with his coffee-spoon poised in mid-air, lest it should strike the side of the cup and become a gong and a desecration, the chatter and clatter seemed more ferocious than before. A half-dozen or so of the people in the restaurant had perhaps ceased to talk. A woman murmured sentimentally that she adored Sibelius and impressed her friend with whom she was dining, who had not heard the name before. A fair-haired youth, in a high collar and a large blue-spotted tie, said something about "good old Chopin," and his companion, a very pretty girl with bobbed hair and a Liberty "art" frock, cried, "Oh, I do hope they'll play the Rag-Picker next!" A fat gentleman in the corner said that he was a little too old for classical music and that what he liked now was "a simple chiune." There were four people in the room who knew what the soloist was playing and there were only two who were sufficiently sober to know that they were listening to the Bach Chaconne, played as it had never been played before, and, probably, would never be played again. Of those two, one was Mr. Matthew Sumner: the other was the large man with the slim girl.

The first fiddle had finished. With the long wisp of yellow hair half over one eye, he swayed a little uneasily on his feet as he made his bow. There was a sporadic applause from a number of people who had not listened to him. Neither Matthew Sumner nor the large man applauded: they stared spell-bound at the fiddler, who was now borrowing a "gasper" from the pianist, and the ash of the cigar that the large man was smoking had grown long and top-heavy and at last had fallen off unregarded on to the sleeve of his coat. The girl in red shrugged her shoulders and with slender fingers rearranged the position of the bands above her arms.

"You haven't admired my new frock yet," she said, petulantly.

"Aw—go to hell!" said her companion, still staring past her at the orchestra; and then he suddenly brought his fist down on to the small table with such force as to spill half of the contents of his coffee cup into the saucer and to upset over the table-cloth three shillings' worth of a liqueur.

"By God, I'll do it!" he cried.

He called a waiter.

"I want to speak to the young man with the fiddle," he said.

A few moments later, the man stood before the table. Matthew Sumner looked at him with a fascinated regard.

His forehead was large: his nose was long: his chin was small and weak: he had a loose mouth and his teeth were stained with cigarette smoking: his eyes were of a greenish-gray colour and of a furtive expression. He might have been any age between thirty and forty. A commonplace young man, thought Sumner—of an unpleasing exterior; but—he had heard him play.

"What's your name?" asked the large man.

"Mauntz, sare."

"A German?"

"No, sare: I am Swiss, from Zurich: but I have been naturalized for many years." His speech was a little thick: his eyes looked anywhere but at his interlocutor: he hiccoughed once or twice behind his hand.

"What time do you go?"

"Go, sare? from here?"

"Yes—yes."

"At ten o'clock, sare."

"Come to my flat as soon as you leave here: here's my card: it's quite near here. I want to talk business to you—you understand, *business:* it will be to your advantage. See—here's a fiver to show you that I mean business."

The first violin picked up the note and, folding it, placed it in a dilapidated pocket-book.

"I will come, sare," he said, with a low bow, "you need not have fear: I will come."

The fiddler returned to the orchestra.

"What did you give that rube five quid for?" asked the girl in red.

"Because I liked the shape of his nose."

"Bah!—and ask him to come to your flat?"

The large man leant heavily across the table and snarled:—

"Look here, Zoe: I don't say you're not pretty: I'm not saying you're not the goods. But I'm not going to have you interfere in my affairs: see? Don't ask questions about what don't concern you. The fatal vice of curiosity has done in better girls than you: once upon a time there was a guy called Bluebeard—savvy? You keep that little rosebud mouth of yours shut—shut tight, except for kissing, and wait for what the little fairies bring you. That's all you've got-ter do: that's all your business. I'll look after mine."

"Righto—don't lose your hair," replied the thin girl. "I don't want to know anything about your beastly business. I want another Grand Marnier."

At that moment the orchestra crashed out into "Alexander's Rag-time Band," and Matthew Sumner heard no longer any connected talk between the two at the table in front of him, above the din of that syncopated music. In the orchestra, he could see the inspired interpreter of the Chaconne swaying backwards and forwards in rhythm to the time, scraping the vibrating strings with a feverish energy, his elf-lock tossing to and fro on his forehead like a sprig of ivy loose across a window pane, as much a part of this mechanic band as the moustached consumptive who played the second fiddle: the bald-headed cellist: or the man at the piano with the *Pink 'Un* sticking out of his coat pocket. As the orchestra—with an almost audible gasp of relief—ended their activity, the large man and the slender girl in red got up and made their way out

of the restaurant. A little later, Matthew Sumner succeeded in paying his bill.

"Who is that who has just gone out?" he asked, as he rose to go—"the man who was sitting at that table there?"

"The gentleman with the lady in the red dress? That is Sare Algernon Stein, sare: he is de boss of the Imperium and the Quincunx and I don't know what . . . He is a very big man indeed, sare . . . he often dines 'ere, sare. Thank you, sare: thank you. Good-night, sare."

Matthew Sumner walked along the muddied pavement and between mean houses with his head in the clouds—and the theme of the Bach Chaconne followed him to bed.

Some ten days later, Mr. Matthew Sumner again passed through the doors of the Restaurant Govard. The memory of bad food, bad wine and bad company had so far deterred him from this adventure. But to-night he could no longer resist the wish to hear again—if the gods would so order it—the wonder-music of the first fiddle.

He had come late. There was no vacant table; and at last he found himself sitting at a small table in front of the large man, who, apparently, had been dining alone.

He ordered something from the bill of fare and a small Perrier water. The band was playing some rag-time, popular at the moment (the description of which Sumner did not know), with a considerable emphasis. When they stopped Sumner gave a sigh of relief. Possibly the large man sitting opposite him overheard it, for he said to Sumner:

"Beastly noise, isn't it?"

"It's hardly agreeable," replied Matthew Sumner.

"Agreeable be damned," said the large man, "it's bloody awful!"

"Yes—it is—er—most unpleasant," said Sumner nervously.

The waiter brought the large man a cup of coffee and some brandy.

"Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Not at all, sir," said Sumner.

The large man lighted a cigar.

"And yet the fiddler with the yellow hair can play: yes, sir, *play:* and when I say play—by God, I mean play—play the violin. I don't mean fire-works in a penny gaff: I don't mean sentimental miaowing in a Chelsea studio: I mean music—and I know what I'm talking about."

"Indeed, Sir Algernon . . ."

"Oh, you know who I am"—and the large man threw himself back in his chair, put his cigar in the left-hand corner of his mouth, his thumbs into his waistcoat, and visibly expanded. "So when I say that fellow there can play . . ."

"Yes, I know he can: I heard him play Bach the other night."

"Ah, you were here too. I see you know something about music, sir."

"Indeed, I don't . . . I am fond of it . . . I . . ."

But Sir Algernon Stein was shouting loudly for the waiter. He looked at Sumner's glass.

"You're not a teetotaler, sir? Don't say you're a teetotaler?"

"I am not; but . . ."

"You will drink a glass of wine with me?"

"No—no—really, sir; besides, I see you have finished your dinner."

"What—hell—does that matter? drink the Widow any old time. Waiter! A bottle of the Widow—vite—sharp—at once!"

Mr. Matthew Sumner's protestations and excuses were swept aside. Sir Algernon Stein—with a great expenditure of energy—said that he would not be denied; and a few minutes later Sumner was drinking champagne.

"It was a wonderful performance," said Sumner.

"It was. The Chaconne wants a bit of playing: and it wasn't only the execution. I tell you . . ." the large man stopped abruptly, and tossed off a glass of Clicquot at a gulp.

"Have you ever heard Kobinsky?" he asked.

"Some years ago."

"He played better then than he does now. Do you think he played as well as this fellow?"

"No, I don't think he did."

"Nor did the others."

"The others? I thought there was hardly anybody in the restaurant who took any notice at all of . . ."

"No—sir: not here. In the Georgian Hall. The critics, man, the critics. Old Gimbold—and Hatton of the *Times:* and Meyersberg—young Preston woke him up after the first few bars, which was damned sporting of him; and Jimmy Eld, and the *Daily Mail* man. All the whole pack of 'em: went off the deep end—every one of 'em! Say I don't know genius when I hear it? Say there's no music in me? Look at this, man: look at *this!*"

Sir Algernon Stein took out of his breast-pocket a bloated pocket-book, and, taking some newspaper cuttings from it, threw them across to Mr. Matthew Sumner. They were neatly docketed in the left-hand top corner and the first cutting that he picked up appeared to be from the *Times.*

Matthew Sumner read them through carefully and with a growing wonder. "They are very enthusiastic," he said, handing the newspaper cuttings back to Stein. "But I don't quite understand. These are all about Kobinsky."

"Of course they are. Good God! you don't suppose I'm going to stick up an unknown man on the Georgian Hall audience? Oh, I know what I'm about. What do you think an English audience pays a guinea a seat for? To hear *music?* Bah! they don't know one note from another. They pay their money—bless 'em—to hear Kobinsky—to *see* Kobinsky: to say afterwards: 'Oh! my dear, I went to hear Kobinsky last night.' They don't

want to go to their friends and say: 'I heard John Smith—or I heard Auguste Duval—last night—a quite unknown genius: he was marvellous. . . .' Pouf! *That* doesn't cut any ice . . . not a champagne-bucket full. Aw! but I'm clever: they had to hear Kobinsky and they heard Kobinsky—at least as far as *they* were concerned."

"I don't understand," wailed Mr. Matthew Sumner.

"Look here, Mr. —er—I don't know your name."

"Sumner."

"Look, Mr. Sumner—this is not to go beyond ourselves: not that it really matters: nobody would believe you, anyway."

"No, no, Sir Algernon; of course I won't . . ."

"All right—when I like a man—damme, I trust him: I'm a judge of men. There's no flies on Algernon Stein. I carried the whole blessed thing off—with honours. I'll tell you."

Sir Algernon Stein filled his guest's glass: filled his own: emptied it, and began:

"Kobinsky is *difficile:* in fact, he's a damn nuisance. He was due to play on the 15th, at the Georgian Hall. On the 14th I was dining here. I had a message to say that Kobinsky had gone off with a damn woman he's running around with and wasn't playing on the 15th. And, God damn it all, I'd got the whole house booked up to the gods! Well, it was too late: there was nothing to be done: I'd lose money, and, what was worse, reputation over the business: and there it was. I could be nasty to Kobinsky about it afterwards: but that wouldn't help me any: and, besides, Kobinsky has the name and can do pretty well as he likes, curse him! Then that tow-haired creature in the band there got up and played his piece: played the Chaconne, by God! You heard him play—you know what it was like. And then I had a brain-wave—I—Algernon Stein: and he—the Swiss Muntz, fiddler in a Soho eating-house, played at the Georgian Hall before Hatton and Meyersberg and Gimbold and all the nobs—*and* knocked 'em!"

"But he isn't a bit like Kobinsky: they all said . . ."

"Ain't he the same height and build? that's good enough. Why, I took him round to Clarkson beforehand: and if, after he had finished with him, you had put 'em side by side, Kobinsky's own mother wouldn't have known which from which. Aw, believe me, Clarkson's a bloody marvel. Besides, Kobinsky being such a hairy brute helped a bit."

"Good gracious! Do you mean to say that that young man there was disguised as Kobinsky and deceived the critics and the audience of the Georgian Hall?"

"Pre-cise-ly."

"But it's wonderful: it's hardly credible. If I had not, myself, heard him play the other night . . ."

"Aw! I'm Algernon Stein," said the large man, with a great air.

"But what will Kobinsky say about it?" asked Matthew Sumner, wonderingly.

"Kobinsky will jolly well keep his mouth shut. Why, man, he can't do anything else. What? tell the world and his wife that a coffee-place string-scraper in a wig played as well as he could—*better* than he could—until Hatton was sloppy about him in the *Times,* and Gimbold wrote as he hasn't written about anybody for fifteen years! You can bet a pony to a penny he's on the strict q-t about the whole business."

"What an amazing thing! Well, I am very glad that the young man has been discovered at last."

"Eh? What?"

"I have always held, Sir Algernon, that genius will out—sooner or later. Now this young man here, after toiling for years for a livelihood in a third-rate orchestra like this—to be discovered . . ."

"Do you think I'm a blasted idiot?" broke in Sir Algernon Stein.

"I beg your pardon," said Sumner.

"Do you think I'm a fool? This fellow is not going to be discovered: you bet your life on it. He's going to

play on here in this gaff—or any other gaff that is fool enough to have him, if he gets the bird here—for the rest of his natural."

"But—but, Sir Algernon," broke in Matthew Sumner, "he is a genius: you admit it yourself: you have discovered him. Why . . .?"

"Do you think I don't know my business? What do you think I am? A philanthropic institution for helping the incompetent? Yes, yes, I know—don't interrupt me—of course, he can play—don't I know that?—but what use is that to me? What I want is the *name*. Why, it would take years and years to work the public up to the point of coming to hear *this* fellow. I tell you I know my business—*and* the public. As for discovering new geniuses; I leave that to the small speculators: I'm not going to waste my time and money on it. Let him get a certain amount of notoriety—if he's got the guts to do it—which he hasn't—and I'll take him up when he's known—but I'll be hanged if I'll touch him with a barge-pole before he gets a name."

"But this is horrible—horrible," broke in Mr. Matthew Sumner, excitedly. "The man's a genius—and you know it—you're leaving him to waste his life in a place like this. It's—it's awful."

"If he's a genius he'll push his way: and when he's pushed his way and made a stir, I'll pick him up. Aw, you don't know what genius it: you talk like a bally schoolgirl. Genius is not being able to play or paint or write or any damned thing—thousands can do that. It's push, man, *push*—genius is *guts*. That fellow's got no *guts*—however much he plays, when he is the right amount drunk, or he wouldn't be where he is now."

"But it's shameful, sir: it's—it's damnable."

"I don't care what it is: all I know is it's business: and I've got-ter make my living like anybody else. Besides, *he* can't grouse. Good God, he got twenty quid for a quarter of an hour's work: more than he ever got in his life before. And he's a weak-kneed fool, I tell

you. Good God, why didn't he tear off his false beard when it was all over, and the house roaring its applause —and even old Meyersberg awake and clapping? It would have knocked me badly: they would never have forgiven me: but, God, what an ad. for him! And why didn't he do it? Because he's got no guts: because he was afraid of me—the great Stein: because he's got a sick wife and wanted a paltry twenty quid at once. Bah! what business has *he* to have a sick wife: or a wife at all: if he was a genius, he would have seized the opportunity; let the sick wife die—what's that go to do with music?"

"But—but," stuttered Matthew Sumner, "it's abominable. "I'll t-tell everybody about it! I'll——I'll . . ."

"No, you won't," said Sir Algernon Stein, as he rose heavily from his chair and towered over Sumner. "Oh no, you won't. First, because you have said you wouldn't, and that probably means something to *you:* and secondly, because if you do nobody will believe you. By all means, go and tell everybody: go and tell Gimbold, if you don't mind being kicked downstairs for your pains: go and tell it in the clubs, if you don't mind being called a liar: tell it to the office-boy in Carmelite House: it won't go any further: tell it to the tin-bellies in Whitehall: it will make them laugh: and when you've told everybody come and tell me how you've got on: it will amuse me."

Sir Algernon Stein turned abruptly and strode out of the restaurant.

Matthew Sumner sat for some little time at his table in an ill mood. The remaining champagne stood untouched in the glass before him: he lit a cigar and a minute later laid it on his plate, where it went out, and was smoked, after he had left the restaurant, by a waiter. Most of the tables were empty by the time he went, and the orchestra had put away their instruments some ten minutes earlier.

As he was making his way out a tall figure in a shabby overcoat slipped through the swing doors in front of him. He wore a shapeless hat of dark felt and carried

under his arm a violin-case. Outside, the tall figure turned northward towards Shaftesbury Avenue, and Mr. Matthew Sumner, obeying the impulse of the moment, followed him a little distance behind.

Up Shaftesbury Avenue and into Charing Cross Road, Mr. Matthew Sumner followed the first violin, and up the Charing Cross Road into Tottenham Court Road. Half-way up Tottenham Court Road the tall figure in the shabby overcoat turned into one of the dark streets on the left: Matthew Sumner still followed him. Here there were but few people in the streets and it was easy for Sumner to keep the man in front of him in sight. The two proceeded, in this manner, through a labyrinth of mean streets for some time. At length the fiddler turned suddenly into a mean court, out of a meaner and even more shabby-looking street. There was a lamp-post in the middle of the court, whose sickly light served only to show the filth and refuse in the gutter, the uneven stones of the court and the grime-encrusted walls of the houses.

Matthew Sumner stood hesitant at the mouth of the court. But the tall figure of the first violin was underneath the lamp-post, bent over something on the ground. A moment later, while Sumner was still watching, the figure rose, holding, in its right hand, a violin. With a sudden semi-circular sweep of the arm it smashed the violin against the lamp-post. There was a sharp crash of splintering woodwork and the stones of the court were strewn with pieces of the shattered instrument.

"Good God! why did you do that?" he cried.

The first violin of the orchestra of the Restaurant Govard turned and looked stupidly at Matthew Sumner.

"I play no more," he said.

"B-b-but . . ." stammered Sumner.

"I play no more in de orchestra," continued the other, waving the broken neck of the fiddle, which he still held in his right hand, "and zo—I break my violin. It has been played—you may not believe it, sare—by de great

Kobinsky: before tousands and tousands of people: but de great Kobinsky will play it no more, and zo—de violin is broken. To-morrow I become a waiter: der are more tips."

"Stop!" cried Sumner.

But the figure in the stained overcoat and the felt hat had already vanished from the mean court, and Mr. Matthew Sumner was left alone in the uneven light of a lamp with a cracked pane, in company with a cheap violin-case and the scattered bits of a broken fiddle.

CHAPTER VIII: THE QUAINT INQUIRY OF THE CANON FIENNES

AN overgrown moon hung in the middle sky, throwing long and hard shadows upon the lower terrace. The world, decked out in black and silver, was so silent at this hour of night that the footsteps of the solitary walker awoke (it almost seemed) reverberating echoes in that great tranquillity; so that Matthew Sumner fell into a mincing gait as though he were walking in a cathedral nave.

He had lost count of the number of times that he had paced the terrace—four or five times it may have been—or he could have believed an hundred: and each time, as he reached one end or the other and turned to walk back again, he felt less inclined than ever to go to bed or to leave these wide and silent spaces for the habitable partitions of a house, full of small noises.

A broad ladder of silver lay upon the still sea; a sea of glass, whose mirrored surface was not disturbed by any wind or tide. Behind, the high hills loomed like grey ghosts standing sentinel over a marble city. Squares of light in a few uncurtained windows informed the watchful that this large and magical orb had not, at least as yet, frozen the town into sleep or death.

About the middle of the terrace, Sumner stopped suddenly. Something had fallen, with a tinkling noise, upon the stones of the terrace, almost at his feet. It was a noise as though someone had dropped a coin; though in that unbroken stillness it sounded to Sumner as a clash of gongs: as a falling edifice: as the disintegration of a star.

He put his hand automatically into his trousers pocket.

A few franc pieces: a five-franc counter: three twenty-franc counters—he seemed to have dropped nothing. He bent down and searched the ground around him. Presently, a yard of so away, he saw a small object that glimmered palely in the moonlight. He picked it up. It was nothing that he had dropped. It was a crucifix.

Mr. Matthew Sumner held the cross in his open palm. It was a small crucifix about one and a half inches in length, such as is often worn by Papists or by Anglican ecclesiastics of a ritualistic turn of mind. It was made of ivory and carried a silver Christ. As far as Matthew Sumner could see by the light of the moon, the workmanship was not remarkable: the crucifix being of a kind that may be bought at a moderate cost at any dealer's in ecclesiastical symbols and appurtenances. Nevertheless, the ornament was no doubt of value to the owner, and Matthew Sumner looked around him to discover how it had come to fall beside him.

On the lower terrace he was alone, so that he naturally looked up to the higher terrace, that lay some twenty feet above where he stood. It was hardly thinkable that even a madman or a religious iconoclast should throw a crucifix from some spot below up on to a higher place. The marble balustrade above shone very whitely in the moonlight, and leaning upon it with folded arms was a black and indistinct figure.

Matthew Sumner walked to the end of the lower terrace, where were the steps. These he climbed, and a few moments later he stood beside the figure that leant upon the parapet. He had made no movement since Sumner had walked this long way round—and so still did he seem that Sumner stood hesitant, with the crucifix in his hand, feeling that it was impertinent to interrupt a reverie so deep or at all to advertise his presence to this immobile stranger.

Like a small schoolboy, rubbing foot against foot, standing on the study carpet before the schoolmaster's desk, unknowing how to tell the unapproachable of this and

make him look up from those untidy papers—so Matthew Sumner stood on this high terrace regarding the man before him.

The man was wrapped about in a black beaver coat of a fashionable and somewhat exotic cut, topped with a deep astrakan collar. His head was covered with a soft velour hat of a silver-grey hue and of a rakish mould, worn rather on the back of the head, so that there lay bare to the moonlight a high dome of a forehead—like an egg. The face was round, clean-shaven and benevolent: little could be seen of the eyes behind the pair of large, gold-rimmed spectacles; and Matthew Sumner was instantly reminded of Mr. Pickwick—younger and of more worldly experience (Sumner imagined): a little less rotund perhaps—but very much Mr. Pickwick all the same.

"Excuse me, sir," said Matthew Sumner, at length, "but I think, perhaps, you may have dropped this," and he held out the cross in his hand to the stranger. "I was walking on the terrace below . . ."

The man in the beaver coat and the astrakan collar had risen and turned half round, and now stood before Sumner, smiling agreeably.

"Dear me, is it the crucifix?" he asked, in a somewhat deep and clearly articulated voice.

"Fortunately," said Sumner, handing him the cross, "it is not broken."

"What, again?" replied the other, holding the crucifix in his hand and staring at it stupidly; "how very awkward!"

"I beg your pardon," said Sumner.

"It is no matter. I have to thank you, sir, for having done me no small service. But I perceive that, although I have a distaste for any form of exercise, I must make an effort."

With these words, the Pickwickian gentleman threw the crucifix on to the stones at his feet, and, stamping his heel firmly upon the cross, spun round upon that axis

several times, with great energy and rapidity. He stopped, and stepping aside, scattered with his toe the little pile of dust and fragments that remained. Removing his gold-rimmed spectacles with care, he took a black silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of his overcoat and began polishing the lenses in an absent manner.

"You must forgive me, sir," he said, "my melodramatic sense: but once a ritualist, always a ritualist. . . . I remember how worried poor old Dr. Scott was: but then, to be sure, Lady Allingham was miserably evangelical . . ."

But Sumner was not listening. He stood rigidly: hardly understanding what he had seen: with a crowd of thoughts bubbling up into his mind, each one more grotesque than the last: and growing more frightened each succeeding fraction of a second than any man should have need to be on this material earth.

The high and wide place within which he had stood so carelessly a moment since at once seemed to have been raised to an immeasurable altitude, and the broad terrace had grown, as it were, to a plateau several leagues across. In the distance behind, the white mass of the Casino was but a tiny and toy fairy palace at the base of the foothills many miles away. The stone balustrade—but, in fact, a few feet off—seemed remote and intangible. The clump of palm-trees at the corner was an oasis a day's journed across the desert. The sea was the circumambient stream about the round earth: and the moon, a parochial luminary easily forgotten and of no comfort to the soul of man. Somewhere—a thousand fathoms below and beyond—lay the little harbour of Monaco: with its crooked and narrow streets and quay-side wine-shops. In that remote and humane quarter, seamen were no doubt—at this very moment—sitting before plank tables happily and humanly drunk. Here and now, in bars: in the bare streets: in a dusty garret corner, girls were chaffering for a franc more than the stipulated sum, or extracting the remaining sou from the pocket of a drunken sailor. In those high palaces around the faërie temple of

Chance, those who had lost, thought of self-killing, to awake in the morning to a more ingenious imagination: and the fortunate, happily adding together many figures on a sheet of paper or in a particular note-book, fell quickly asleep to dream of a young face and an old wine and the promise of To-morrow.

But all these familiar and consoling things were far away for Matthew Sumner. He stood centred in a great and empty space alone with a benevolent gentleman, a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and the scattered fragments of a broken Christ. Chaotic and devilish fancies bore in on Matthew Sumner. He seemed to remember—in a space of seconds—all the tales that he had heard of demonology, of devil worship, of the Black Mass, of the Antichrist: stories told him by his nurse: grim tales out of Grimm: early fancies that he supposed long forgotten: childish fears that he thought he had outlived. Was this kindly and very courteous gentleman an emissary of the devil? Was this Pickwick, the Antichrist? It was unbelievable: an insult to reason. And yet—the crucifix lay as dust upon the terrace. It was terrible. A Mephistopheles all red and black, with the evil laughter and cleft hoof, shattering the Christ on the high altar: defiling the Host . . . this, all this he could have understood. But this very peaceable and human body: academic: benevolent: short-sighted: wiping his glasses meticulously with his handkerchief and murmuring an apology the while—it was very much more than horrible: it was quite un-understandable; and Mr. Matthew Sumner was afraid.

Like all agnostics, Sumner had a deep reverance for the symbols of the Christian religion and for the rites and ceremonies of the Holy Church. He was always very careful to pay the due observances, where such were demanded; although he was, as he was pleased to style himself, an unbeliever—and, if anything at all, a pagan. It hurt him to hear a service slovenly performed: bad incense annoyed him not only because it was bad incense,

but because it was bad form. About to enter a church he habitually took off his hat half-a-dozen paces before the door, and, on going out again, did not put it on until he was clear almost of the shadow of the building. When he walked, even in ancient and deserted churches, he paced on tip-toe and talked in a whisper: and he had once spoken to a Christian Italian plasterer in a basilica, who smoked a cigarette while at his work, with disagreeable results.

Matthew Sumner was horrified.

"I really must offer you a very deep apology," continued the Pickwickian gentleman. "I fear I have . . . I should have waited until you had gone. You are, perhaps, of the Roman persuasion; you are rightly . . ."

"No, no," broke in Sumner, "I am a pagan—I . . . I . . . I suppose. But . . ."

"I am not the Devil," continued the other, placing his spectacles upon his nose again and smiling amiably upon the disturbed Sumner, "nor am I an emissary of the Devil. I do not, in point of fact, believe in the Devil: to believe in the Devil is to believe in God: to believe in God (you must pardon me a too facile epigram) is the devil."

"But why this . . . this desecration? It is not seemly: it is not . . . I am a mere agnostic myself: but I do not presume . . . I simply do not know."

"But I *do* know," said the gentleman in the astrakan collar—almost jovially for so urbane and benevolent a person—"I *do* know, sir. I have completed my inquiry. But . . ."

The Pickwickian gentleman paused and searching in an inside pocket brought out a small gold card-case. He took out a card, which he handed to Sumner.

"I owe you more than an apology," he said, "I owe you an explanation. You will find there my name and address. I beg that you will do me the pleasure of lunching with me to-morrow at half-an-hour after twelve o'clock. I can give you a quite respectable wine; my cook understands a sole,

and I can promise you agreeable company. We shall be a *parti carré:* but afterwards we can talk. I must once more thank you for your kindness and your patience. I bid you good-night."

With a smile and a bow and a sweep of the grey velour hat the stranger was gone, without waiting to allow Mr. Matthew Sumner time to refuse (as he had intended to do) the invitation.

Under the nearest lamp-post, on his way back to his hotel, Matthew Sumner read the following inscription:—

CANON H. L. COULSTON-FIENNES.
Villa Marianna,
Monte Carlo. Carfax Club.

Mr. Matthew Sumner sat at table with his head in a whirl. The table was a round one, very beautifully inlaid, and the plates rested on small, delicately embroidered mats, and the Venetian glass was genuine and of considerable value.

The table stood in the centre of the wide balcony of the Villa Marianna. Stone pillars at each of the four corners supported a painted canopy, and around these pillars, red and white roses hung in careless profusion and filled the place with their scent. Below lay the sea. The white marble parapet hid from sight the red earth of the cliff, the dark green foliage of the myrtles and half of the water. The other half stretched above a marble horizon, blue as a sapphire stone, until the sea drew up and died away into a bluer sky, showing no line of division between air and water: so that any ship with a land-wind on its quarter might easily sail out and at last upward into the sky, to hang there upside down in the painted firmament with no other skill required in the pilot than to steer a straight course and such little faith as God might give him.

Sumner sat opposite the Canon and between the two most beautiful girls in the world—or so he vowed to

himself they were, as he sat smitten into silence at their beauty. The younger—she may have been nineteen—had an elfin face that looked out, with a mock seriousness, from a great cloud of red-gold hair which flamed to a tint of burnished copper whenever the sun's rays caught it. Her slender form was draped in greek silk: a string of amber beads, as large as hen's eggs, hung around her neck, and a great barbaric bracelet of gold, three inches in breadth, like a handcuff, clasped her left wrist. She spoke English brokenly. She told Sumner that she was still at the *conservatorie*.

The other was, perhaps, a year—or even two years—older, tall, sinuous and of a grave expression. Her hair, jet black and of a metallic lustre, was parted in the middle and brought down low on either side of the forehead, across which was stretched a broad band or fillet of gold. She wore a dress of gold, threaded with silver, that scintillated in the sunlight.

They were introduced to Sumner simply as Lalage and Corinna: and they did all the talking; in French, in broken English, and in a little Italian from Corinna, who was from Sicily. Matthew Sumner was tongue-tied in this company: he sipped at his Chateau Yquem as though on sufferance. He hardly tasted the excellence of the *caviare:* the *sole véronique:* the *bécasse à la favart:* the *soufflé surprise* and the big peaches. He heard even less of the little that Canon Coulston-Fiennes said, as with a Pickwick-like benignity he ministered to the entertainment of his guest, smiling through spectacles that flashed in the sunshine: now and again interposing a remark amidst the chatter of Corinna and Lalage: or genially upbraiding his guest for not doing his duty to a memorable *crue*.

Coffee was handed round by a flunkey in black and silver and a case of cigars and some old brandy placed on the table.

"Little ones," said the Canon, as soon as the flunkey had gone, "run away: avaunt: *allez!*"

In a little gale of laughter the girls left the table, and

Matthew Sumner, standing somewhat stiffly, felt that his formality was not wanted and certainly not understood.

"They are good girls," said Canon Coulston-Fiennes:—

> "'pone sub curru nimium propinqui
> solis in terra domibus negata:
> dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
> dulce loquentem.'

"but we want to talk—a little seriously perhaps. I have not forgotten that I owe you, sir, more than this poor entertainment: I owe you an explanation. But, first, this is truly Napoleon brandy and these cigars are in as good a condition as can be expected in this place."

Matthew Sumner lighted his cigar and sipped the old brandy.

"Sir," he said, stuttering somewhat more than usual, as he was accustomed to do when nervous, "I do not think you owe m-me any ap-p-pology. If I have b-been of any service at all t-to you . . . I d-do not see that I . . . I . . . have . . . I am only t-too g-glad. P-please . . . there is n-no n-n-need to explain anything. I sometimes think that the l-less one exp-plains, the better it is f-for . . ."

"But," broke in the Canon, "I can hardly do otherwise; and I really wish to do so. You will, I know, consider that what I am about to tell you is a very private matter and not to be repeated."

"I p-promise, sir, that I . . . I . . ."

"You will, I am sure, respect this confidence. And it will really be of help to me to talk to you of my research —which is now, I think, about to be concluded. I will begin at the beginning.

"You will no doubt remember that Grayminster is a sleepy old town?"

"I have never been there: I can imagine . . ."

"I was a Canon in the Cathedral of Grayminster; for that matter, I suppose I am still Canon there."

Matthew Sumner murmured something that sounded

like "not at all;" it did not seem of much relevance, and Canon Coulston-Fiennes ignored it—or, perhaps, did not hear it.

"In Grayminster, there is little to obscure one's purpose or to distract a scholar from his books. I am not married and I was free in that seclusion to officiate, so far as I was worthy, in God's house: to comfort the unhappy: to console the sick and the bereaved: to acquaint the dying with God's mercy: and to study a little the history of the Faith and of the Word. I believed—at that time—in God. I believed in the Good: but, above all, I believed in evil: that is to say, I believed in the evil inherent in evil doing: that that which is understood by the Christian Church as cardinal sin can, *ipso facto,* bring no happiness to the sinner: not even a temporary happiness, if once the sinner has walked in purity of heart and with a humble spirit. I believed this fully: it is perhaps easy to believe so in Grayminster. It was my strongest appeal with the very few in my flock who went astray. I used to say: 'Are you any happier now that you have done this? I say that it is wrong to break these commandments: but if, when you have disobeyed these laws of God, devised by Him—not to withhold pleasures from His children—but to make them, in the fulfilment of these injunctions, more happy—I say if, after these disobediences, you are truly happier, I will reconsider my claims.' It was the most potent argument: it did not fail. Sinners—in Grayminster—are not happy. Let me give you a little more of this very excellent brandy?"

"No, no . . . really . . ." murmured Sumner.

"An Aristotelian moderation—not in accord, I think, with the occasion: but it were discourteous to press a guest. I will proceed. I do not bore you?"

The Canon of Grayminster removed his gold-rimmed spectacles and rubbed the lenses carefully with his handkerchief—as seemed to be a habit with him. He smiled—a little anxiously, Sumner thought—as he repeated "I do not want to bore you."

"I am most interested," Matthew Sumner reassured him.

"I came across, some years ago, some poems by a man called Mason, I think: or, perhaps, Masefield. I am unorthodox—or some, at least, think me unorthodox—enough to regard them as very Christian poems. There was one called 'The Eternal Mercy': a line of it has stuck in my mind:—'Of bad cigars and a heavy drink': it seemed to me to be very significant of the inherent grossness of vice. The way of the transgressor, Mr.—er—Sumner—the way of the transgressor is hard. Again and again in the pursuance of my office as a priest of God I was shown the truth of this text; in Grayminster, and, above all, when I was a younger man and a curate in a poor London parish. The gin palace—the painted prostitute—the garish music-hall—brutality and drunkenness and disease: here, God knows, the way of the upright man was hard enough; but the way of the transgressor was harder still. I do not want to talk at too great a length on a purely theological point: I but want to make clear to you how largely one particular aspect of the Christian concept of conduct loomed in my mind. When, later, I was appointed Canon and reached the grey quietness of Grayminster I was able to consider more deeply on this doctrinal point. In the tranquillity of my study in the Cathedral close, I was able to read and to consult many authorities: the early fathers (I found *De Civitate Dei* very illuminating): many learned, but now forgotten, commentators: and the material result of my labours was a small tract of which I am still, strangely enough, a little proud, called *Beatus Vir*. And then . . ."

The Canon paused and Sumner cried, "Yes?"

"My elder brother was killed—a few days before the Armistice."

"I am very sorry," murmured Matthew Sumner; "it is sad to think that . . ."

"I am not," interrupted the Canon, genially, "I am very glad.

Sumner stared at his Pickwick-like host—striving to find something to say that might be in the least respect suitable—staring with wide eyes at those too amiable spectacles.

"I am very glad. My brother was a wealthy man: I was his heir."

Sumner made some sort of noise in his throat: he wondered if he was expected to be congratulatory.

"When the necessary legal formalities," continued the Canon, "had been completed, I found that I was a very rich man: even as riches go nowadays. I did not make immediately—why should I? I was happy in Grayminster—any great change in my way of living: I laid down a little port: I bought some books and pictures that I had long coveted; and I subscribed to several charities.

"One day—some months after the death of my brother—I was at a function—a private view, if I remember rightly, of etchings (I forget the name of the etcher)—and there I overheard a remark that made a deep impression on me. I heard one woman say to another: 'I would indulge in vice if it wasn't so sordid.' When I got home, I read over again my tract *Beatus Vir:* I felt it was sound But I could not let that ingenious hypothesis go unchallenged: the common vice of the streets and the public bar is sordid enough, God knows. But suppose there was no sordidness . . .suppose . . . And then, in a flash, sitting at my desk with the lamp-light on the folio page of my Aquinas . . .I resolved to prove this woman wrong. I had, in my hand, the means to eliminate all sordidness: I could make vanish all unpleasant things with a golden wand. I would myself make the supreme inquiry: I would break God's commandments in order to prove that in so doing there is no happiness, however lovely be the garden of Armida—however strewn with flowers be the broad and easy path. I would prove that the woman was wrong—and I would complete my research with another tract to be complementary to *Beatus Vir:* I would call it *Peccata Mundi.*"

"I think," said Matthew Sumner, "I begin to understand—something: but why last night—and the crucifix? . . . I do not quite understand that . . .though, perhaps, I do—er—er . . . this," and Sumner waved his hand a little vaguely about him. 'The inquiry, I think you told me, is now finished. You are, sir, I believe, a good and very brave man. I should much like to see a copy of—er—*Peccata Mundi,* when it is printed."

"I am sorry, Mr. Sumner, that you will be unable to do that. I do not propose to write the tract."

"I am sorry: why?"

"Because the woman was right."

A very valuable piece of Venetian glass shattered to fragments on the stone at Sumner's feet; with his handkerchief, he mopped up the brandy that he had spilt upon his coat. Canon Coulston-Fiennes filled another glass and handed it to him: Matthew Sumner drained it automatically.

"The woman was right: I was wrong: and not only I, but many others: our Lord—or—er—rather, I should say, Jesus (it is difficult to break away from the habits of half a lifetime) was wrong: and Christianity is dead."

"No!—emphatically, no! Surely . . ."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Sumner, but I understood you to say you were a pagan. Let me continue. I began my inquiry by buying a Rolls-Royce car and I engaged Jenkins: he is still with me: he is a fine driver; he is helpful and the soul of discretion. I should feel quite lost now without Jenkins. I then took a suite of rooms at the Ritz . . . but I soon decided to go to Paris. I spent the season at Deauville, where, I believe, I was very popular. Last spring I was in Rome and Palermo. I have come here from Biarritz. There is no need to describe to you, in any detail, the progress of my research. I learnt, you may conceive, much. I learnt, above all things, the art of enjoyment: as the French have it—to amuse myself well. I waited for the prick of conscience; for remorse —Dante's *nessun maggior dolore*—I waited in vain. I

was happier than I had ever been before. I had become pagan."

"And last night?"

"I had decided to make definite my conversion. I had already decided, as soon as I returned to England, to leave a Church in whose articles I could no longer believe; and one of the few symbols of the faith, that I had still left about me, was the small crucifix which you saw me destroy on the terrace last night. It seemed to me a fitting conclusion to a successful and most entertaining inquiry. Let me give you just a little more brandy?"

"No, no: I have had two glasses already."

"If you will excuse me, I will have another glass myself: it is very mellow. I hope you weren't bored with my young friends?"

"I thought they were wholly delightful."

"They are—and they are kind and dutiful to a middle-aged man like myself. I am keeping Lalage at the *conservatoire* yet another year—she is only nineteen now—her execution is really good: and she is, of course, very properly grateful. Corinna is a little older and has a more mature wit: her father is an impecunious and (I am afraid) rather scoundrelly Count: he owns some barren acres and a picturesque ruin at Castelbuono. I was fortunate in being able to rescue him out of the hands of the Jews. Let us call the girls back: we have been serious quite long enough."

"No, no, I must be going," said Sumner, getting up rather hurriedly, "I really must. I am much indebted to you for telling me about yourself. If you will allow me to say so, sir, I respect you for your intellectual honesty. It is rare to find a man with so great a courage: the courage not only to discard what he no longer can believe without any compromise, but openly to adopt a way of life which will invite censure. Even to the destruction of a symbol, I am bound to admit that you are consistent. I must say good-bye."

Mr. Matthew Sumner almost ran down the steps of the Villa Marianna on to the white road, followed by the helioscopic-like flashes of a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and to an accompaniment of girlish laughter.

Mr. Matthew Sumner was sitting in the upper smoking-room of the Carfax club, a little after six o'clock. The room, at that hour, is usually empty and Matthew Sumner was alone. He had been reading *Mansfield Park* for some little time when the door of the room opened and a member came in. After picking up the current number of the *Spectator* from the round table at the far end of the room, the new-comer crossed over to the fireplace and sat down opposite Matthew Sumner. He wore a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and, except for the fact that he was in clerical black and wore a clergyman's collar, was very like Mr. Samuel Pickwick.

Matthew Sumner looked up from his book—and then dropped it. "Canon Coulston-Fiennes?" he gasped.

"Surely it is Mr. Sumner," replied the other. "I didn't recognize you when I came in: you must pardon me: I am very short-sighted."

But Matthew Sumner could only gasp, "Then you were right after all—and you have come back to complete your—er—testimony? I am really delighted—delighted . . ."

"No, no: it is not exactly that: not quite that," murmured the Canon. "I am still of the same persuasion as when I saw you in Monte Carlo."

"But—I understood that you were leaving the Church?"

"Ah, yes: yes. I did think so at one time. But I decided not to. Indeed it was some remarks of yours that made me alter my mind."

"Me!" cried Sumner.

"Yes. Perhaps you do not remember, but you said that I was consistent: you were kind enough to speak well of my intellectual courage, my honesty, in—ah—accepting a new conclusion . . . I forget your exact words now,

but I thought upon them after you had gone. I began to see that I was not being logical."

"I hardly follow you."

"It is a little subtle, I admit. But, you see, having proved to myself that God was a myth and that good and evil were meaningless terms and that conscience only responded at the prick of some material discomfort: having, in short, accepted the purest hedonism as my rule of life, it seemed to me that to conserve any such outworn virtue as honesty was merely silly. I saw very clearly that to go about telling people that I did not believe in the good might easily become unpleasant: people—really, Mr. Sumner, there are a host of silly folk in the world—people don't like being told these things; most have neither the means nor the capacity for enjoyment. I saw that as a confessed apostle of pleasure I stood a very good chance of ending up as a martyr. And that would have been the very acme of silliness. No, no, Mr. Sumner; I am really fond of the Church: I have a real gift for officiating: and an innate love of ritual. Of course, my wealth has opened up larger possibilities. I have left Grayminster. By the way, I am preaching in the West End to-morrow—on Dives and Lazarus: it always goes down well with a fashionable congregation: if you have nothing better to do, come and hear me."

"I—I am afraid I am going out of town to-morrow."

"Well—well. I am sure you have something better to do. But—perhaps—a little later—when I am . . . but I mustn't be premature . . . of course, it is not yet settled . . . but I believe . . ."

"You believe?"

"Mr. Sumner . . . You will, of course, not repeat this: it is not yet absolutely certain . . . but I have good *calves:* so few of us have good calves: and to wear gaiters, sir, one must (I borrow from Meredith), 'One must have a leg.'"

"Canon Fiennes," cried Sumner, in a voice a tone or so above the normal, "I cannot . . . I cannot . . ."

But the to-be Bishop of Mirchester was staring at the clock on the mantelshelf.

"Good gracious me! . . . It is half-past six: I have Vespers at seven. I must fly."

And before Mr. Matthew Sumner had said what he could not do, the late Canon of Grayminster was out of the room.

CHAPTER IX: THE DROLLERIES OF THE DISCIPLE OF ARISTOTLE

"THE world," said Sir Charles Tyack, swinging his cane viciously, "is a very dull place."

"Sometimes I wish it was," said Mr. Matthew Sumner, with a sigh.

"It is," replied Sir Charles, forcibly, accenting his opinion with a jab of his stick upon the pavement.

For some little while the two men walked on in silence. There is no need for talk between two old friends: and because of this, perhaps old friendships are maintained and jealously guarded against the adverse effects of time and accident. Mr. Matthew Sumner had few friends; but of these few, Sir Charles Tyack was the eldest, and the best loved: and, because Tyack was by nature a wanderer and by employment a colonial tetrarch, these two friends had seen little of each other over a period of years: but whenever Sir Charles Tyack was in London, Matthew Sumner had the first call upon his time.

Sumner had dined with Tyack at the Athenæum: and though the food had been well cooked and the wines well chosen, the talk witty and the meeting one that had been looked forward to by each for more than two years, the heavy stillness of that mausoleum seemed to have entered into and possessed the mind of Tyack.

The two figures—the one tall, the other short: each in dress: alike with opera hats of the same shape and overcoats of the same cut—these two figures, bearing westward along Pall Mall, were as inconspicuous at that hour and in that place as all happenings in the world seemed at that moment to Sir Charles Tyack.

"A dull place," repeated Sir Charles, swinging his cane

again, very angrily. "Matthew, what on earth possessed you to bring an umbrella to-night?"

"Er . . . I don't know, Charles. It's a lovely night: it won't rain. I suppose I picked it up in the hall."

"And picked up your dinner-jacket and trousers in your bedroom, I suppose?"

"No," replied Matthew Sumner, simply, "Cole saw to that."

"So the faithful Cole is still with you?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what you'd do without Cole?"

Mr. Matthew Sumner walked on without reply for a few paces, as if in thought.

"I suppose I would advertise for somebody else," he said at last.

"Dear old Matthew," cried Tyack, "always the same: you never alter, for which I am really and truly grateful. Well, I don't suppose the world will ever be a dull place to you. But I find it monotonous, Matthew; damnably monotonous."

"Well, Charles, I don't know that it is . . ."

"What shall we do to-night?" broke in Tyack.

"It's early yet—only just half-past eight. Shall we look in at some show? It doesn't matter if we're late at a revue."

"They're all bad and they're all the same," complained Tyack.

"Well—it's a lovely night: we can go for a short stroll first, and later on look in at a music-hall for an hour."

"Right you are, Matthew: the streets cannot be duller than a music-hall; and, at least, we can talk more easily here: and there's no doubt that the air's better."

The two men turned up St. James's Street, and half-way up the hill Matthew Sumner suddenly said:—

"It's not dull really, Charles.

Sir Charles Tyack grunted.

"Do you know which is the dullest club in London?" asked Sumner.

"The Athenæum," said Tyack, promptly.

"Oh, that's only because you belong to it."

"Thank you, Matthew."

"No, no: I don't mean that: you know what I mean. But, Charles, there are much duller clubs. Do you belong to many clubs which you never go to?"

"No—thank God."

"Well, I do: I live in London: it's so easy to do that. There's one club I belong to, to which I don't go more than once in two or three months: I practically know no one in it. It's the Granville. It is probably the dullest place in Town: full of Education Office officials and superannuated dons and so forth: it lives on a literary reputation that has been moribund the last twenty years. I dined there by myself two or three nights ago. After dinner I went up to the small library. No one ever goes there: and whether or no the Granville club is the dullest place in London, the small library is without doubt the dullest place in the Granville club. Even the books in the shelves are dull: at least, I have never found the *Badminton Magazine, Blackwood* and county histories exciting. I drank a cup of coffee, and, after having grown tired of the evening paper, I went over to a book-case in the corner of the room to try and find something to read. While I was there some one came into the room. Now the book-case where I was, was a low one, and above it, against the wall, was an oval mirror. As I stood up with the book in my hand—a volume, I remember, of D'Aubigny's *Réformation du XVI*ème *Siècle*—I saw in the mirror, that the member who had come in was a young man in a dinner-jacket. He walked over to the fire. In the centre of the mantelshelf there was a plaster cast from an antique—a head of a philosopher, I have always taken it to be—and of no particular value. He glanced around the room, and seeing that I had my back towards him, and assuming, I suppose, that so I could not see him, he pushed the plaster cast off the mantelshelf. It fell on to the edge of the iron fender and broke into a dozen

pieces, with a considerable clatter. I swung round and stared in amazement at the young man.

" 'How awfully stupid of me,' he said, in a pleasant voice. I stammered something—I don't know what: I don't think he heard me. He leant over and pushed the bell by the side of the fireplace.

" 'Such a silly thing to do,' he repeated, staring at the plaster fragments on the hearthrug.

"I was trying to find something to say: in fact, I was just going to ask him why he did it—which would have been rude: but I couldn't help it—when the door opened and the waiter came in. 'You rang, sir?' he asked, and he stared goggle-eyed at the mess on the floor.

" 'There's been an accident,' he said to the waiter. 'Awfully silly of me, you know; but I was standing balancing myself on the edge of the fender. I lost my balance for a moment and instead of taking hold of the mantelpiece I caught on to the bust and it came away with me. You'd better clear this away and tell them to send me in a bill for the damage done.'

"The waiter began picking up the bits and the young man walked out of the room, muttering, 'Awfully stupid of me.' "

"What an extraordinary story: you're sure it wasn't an accident?"

"My dear Charles, I could see him perfectly well in the mirror. He deliberately pushed the cast off the mantelshelf: after first looking round the room to make sure he wasn't seen. He clearly intended beforehand to smash the bust: he came into the room to do it."

"Well, Matthew, I do not say that the world is a dull place to all folk: as I said before, I am sure it isn't dull to you. You are one of those kind, dear, wholly unenterprising people to whom things always happen. I, on the other hand, who am of an adventurous nature, and for ever poking my nose into unlikely places and other people's affairs—I find only the commonplace: mechanic people working to a prescribed formula."

"I only wish," replied Matthew Sumner, heavily, "that I had your gifts."

"And I, yours," said Sir Charles.

The two friends were now walking along Piccadilly, but the number of people in the street made walking and talking together a little difficult, and the pair turned into Duke Street and thence into the quiet and seclusion of Jermyn Street. On the north side of the street the foot-path was almost deserted except for a slender and graceful figure walking some hundred paces in front of them. Once or twice the woman turned with a half-glance backwards at the two men behind her, but Sir Charles shortened his pace with hers.

"I am growing old, Matthew," he said, "and to-day these occasions cease to amuse. The end of all such adventures is the same and familiar."

"And very pitiful."

"I suppose so: but I have not even that consolation: I am now merely bored."

A large limousine car slid silently past them. It pulled up, a hundred yards or so ahead, behind the church of St. James. The door swung open and a tall young man in a tail coat and silk hat stepped out on to the pavement. The girl had just come up to where he stood. He raised his hat and spoke to her.

"Good Heavens!" cried Matthew Sumner, "it's the same man."

"What man?"

"The young man who broke the bust in the Granville club."

"He seems a very commonplace young man after all," murmured Sir Charles Tyack.

"I don't know," said Sumner.

But Sir Charles Tyack was not listening to Sumner. They were now almost up to the car. The young man had turned back to the car for a moment, and, thrusting his head and shoulders inside, had appeared again, carrying in his hand a bouquet of flowers as large as a coal-

scuttle. He thrust the flowers into the hands of the astonished girl, removed his hat several feet from his head, bowed bareheaded to an un-English angle and, jumping back into the car, was at the end of the street by the time Sir Charles Tyack and Mr. Matthew Sumner had come up to where the girl stood.

"What lovely flowers," said Sir Charles, gravely. They were certainly that: they were orchids of an unusual size and of most wonderful colours. The flowers could hardly have cost less than five pounds and might very easily have cost considerably more.

"You are fortunate," continued Sir Charles, "to have so liberal a lover."

"I never saw him before," said the girl, holding the huge bunch of orchids in a dazed way, "and I don't suppose," she added, pathetically, "I shall ever see him again."

She made no attempt to gain the notice of the two men towards whom she had turned looks of allurement a few moments since. The wholly unexpected held her in amaze, mute, unable to seize at an opportunity. But such would have been without avail. For already Sir Charles Tyack, dragging Matthew Sumner unwillingly after him, was across the road in pursuit of a disengaged taximeter cab.

"Quick," cried Sir Charles, pushing his companion unceremoniously into the cab, "follow that large grey car in front: don't lose sight of it."

"Righto, guv'nor," said the driver.

Sir Charles Tyack threw his body back into the corner of the taxi-cab and smiled.

"Thank God, he murmured, "there was a block at the end of the street."

"What are we going to do?" asked Sumner.

"Not lose sight of your friend, Matthew. Good God, something is happening before my eyes which I can't understand: and I'm going to follow it up."

"I think, Charles," said Sumner, "we had much better not. Let's give this up and drive decently to a music-

hall. There's the Russian ballet; doesn't start till nine o'clock; it's said to be awfully good."

"Damme, no. For the first time in my life I am finding the old world—which I thought I knew so well—no longer dull."

"Charles," said Matthew Sumner, earnestly, "there is a worse thing than finding the world dull."

"Indeed, my dear Matthew, and what is that?"

"Finding the world not dull enough."

Tyack snorted, and Sumner made no further attempt to dissuade his friend from this enterprise.

The taxi-cab had turned up Shaftesbury Avenue and was blocked for some minutes opposite the Trocadero.

"I can't understand it," Sir Charles began again; "here is a young man who wilfully breaks a plaster cast in the most respectable club in London. A few days later he is seen getting out of a Rolls-Royce and giving a bunch of orchids as big as a hay-cock to a *fille de trottoir*, whom he has never seen before in his life, and then hopping in again and driving off like the devil. Damn it, man, where's the connection? And there's no sense in either!"

The large car in front had turned up one of the small side-streets running north from the Avenue into Soho. The cab followed and stopped a few hundred yards up the street.

The driver jumped down and thrusting his head in at the window of the cab, said:—

"The car stopped at the chemist shop, sir: and the bloke 'as gone inside."

"We also," said Sir Charles, "will go into the apothecary's. Wait."

The shop was a small one. The window pretended to no display. The customary three bottles—green, red and yellow, stood in front of uniform rows of tonic, bath-salts and dental preparations. In the bottom of the window was a pyramid of coloured soaps and a few sponges. It was a chemist's shop like any other of the

many in the district; though, perhaps, less lighted and of a more ordinary appearance than most. Sir Charles Tyack pushed open the door and went in, followed by Matthew Sumner. The tall young man stood before the counter. He was bareheaded and his silk hat stood upside-down upon a chair beside him. Tyack looked at him as closely and with as much interest as common politeness might allow. He judged the man to be between the ages of twenty-five and thirty: but as with most fair men, his age was not easy exactly to determine from his appearance. He was clean-shaven: his head was narrow and his nose straight and long. As far as Tyack could see from where he stood at the back of the shop, his eyes were candid and his expression pleasing: there was nothing about him to indicate any eccentricity of mind or to lead the observer to expect in him those grotesque actions of which Tyack and Sumner knew him to be the actor.

The chemist behind the counter was a big, blonde fellow, with a slight moustache and a bald head: his motions were cat-like; his voice held the quality of a caress; and his manner was composed of an equal measure of servility and a false heartiness, that earned for him the immediate dislike of Mr. Matthew Sumner.

The chemist had just handed the young man a small squat tumbler, half filled with a ruddy liquid. The young men, making a wry face, drank the mixture at a gulp.

"Now suck the lozenge, sir," said the chemist, "it will take away the taste."

The young man sucked the lozenge, while the chemist, picking up a spraying-bottle such as is used by barbers, sprayed some scented liquid over the face and forehead of his customer.

"Now the back, sir."

The young man turned and submitted the back of his head and neck to the treatment. The chemist then took up a large, round Japanese fan, and fanned his patient with an air of great solicitude.

"I hope you are feeling better, sir?" he inquired.

"Much better, George."

"And now the eyes."

The chemist took up a small bottle and eye-dropper.

"Head up and eyes wide open. That's right: allow me to raise the eyelid. That is excellent."

"Is that all?"

"That is all I can do, sir. I suggest you take now a cup of black coffee: and I think, in the morning, as soon as you are awake, a little saline. There is nothing else you need, sir?"

Tyack stood beside Sumner looking very gloomy.

"I told you the world was a dull place," he said, in an undertone. "The man was merely drunk: after all, it was the obvious explanation."

"A tube of Alakine tooth-paste," said Sumner: and then, as the door closed behind the young man: "is that a cure for drunkenness?"

"It has a sobering effect, sir, and settles the stomach," replied the chemist; "at least, I am certain it will be effective in this case."

'Why?" asked Sumner, as he put a packet of tooth-paste, which he did not want, into his coat pocket.

"Because my customer, sir, was as sober as I am."

"The man was not drunk?" shouted Tyack.

"No, sir: you can always tell by the eyes. But some of my customers find the treatment agreeable, and it is not my business to question them."

Sir Charles Tyack did not give Mr. Matthew Sumner time to receive his change out of half-a-crown: he bundled him out of the shop and neck and crop into the taxi-cab.

"Which way did the car go?" he shouted at the driver.

"First to the left, sir."

"A guinea if you catch it," cried Sir Charles, and leaning back in the taxi-cab, he solemnly shook hands with Matthew Sumner.

"I must revise my opinion," he said, "and I must thank you, Matthew, for giving me the occasion for doing so."

"I am sorry, Charles," replied Sumner, "that my small

vanity did not allow you to retain so comfortable a conclusion."

The taxi-cab turned the corner just in time to see the large grey limousine disappearing at the end of the street. They were well up with it a few minutes later, and Sir Charles Tyack once again blessed his good fortune.

The car stopped a few minutes later at a theatre off Shaftesbury Avenue. The walls of the building were placarded with large bills showing a red-haired girl clothed in three feathers and a green sash, the drawing of whose body was anatomically incorrect. She was balancing herself with considerable dexterity upon a champagne cork, without any visible means of support, and the title of the revue appeared to be "Bow-wow, Baby!"

By the time Sumner and Tyack were at the box-office the young man in the silk hat had left the foyer.

"Two stalls," said Sir Charles.

"All sold," said the man in the box-office.

"Two dress circle, then."

"All sold."

"Damme, I'll have a box."

"None left."

"You've got a full house to-night," said Sir Charles.

"Ye'es, in a manner speaking." The young man in the office brushed his hair with his hand and looked closely at Sir Charles.

"Haven't you got a seat anywhere?"

"Pit's reserved: might try the gallery."

Sir Charles Tyack bought two gallery seats and he and Sumner began to climb many stairs.

"It is strange," said Tyack, "that plays which draw a full house with a West-end audience often fail to fill the gallery."

"The gallery," replied Sumner, "is, no doubt, more critical. Though this is said to be the worst show in London; and I don't understand them having a full house. The young man in the box-office looked unhappy about

something. I don't quite know why he should say the house was 'full in a manner speaking.'"

"You will know now," said Sir Charles Tyack, quietly, as he stepped into the gallery."

Mr. Matthew Sumner, craning his head over Tyack's shoulder, gasped as he looked at the house below him. The theatre was empty: the stalls were tenantless: the boxes were in darkness and deserted. Sir Charles, straining over the parapet of the gallery, reported the dress circle to be void of human occupation. Only in the gallery a few dozen onlookers sat and watched the play. There was, however, one exception. Precisely in the centre of the front row of orchestra stalls sat a solitary figure. It was a young man in evening dress: even at that distance he was clearly recognisable: it was *the* young man in evening dress.

Sir Charles Tyack paid small attention to the performance, and Mr. Matthew Sumner was too anxious to escape from this empty theatre to heed what was going on on the stage. The numbers were rather worse than are commonly to be seen in such revues and were more than usually badly played: the empty theatre, no doubt, placing a strain upon the artists. There was an Eastern dance as such is understood and appreciated by the younger residents in Putney, Wandsworth and Norwood: there was a song sung by Miss Bobbie Carlyon, called "The Bow-wow Boy," and there was another, sung by Miss Cissie Arden, which ended with the refrain:—

"I'll get a job,
When Bob
Is demob.;
And Bob is demob. to-day."

There was a lady who rode a bicycle backwards and a duologue between a lady-barber and an officer in the Royal Air Force whose exact rank seemed to lie between that shown on his shoulder-straps and that shown on his sleeves. There was a comic song by a cheerful gentleman in white

ducks and a dinner-jacket, called "Peep-bow, Pussyfoot"; and there was a quartet who sang a song which seemed to consist chiefly of the phrase:—

"I've gotta posh new suit:
Toot-toot:
I've gotta posh new suit."

There was a scene in Montmartre in which *ma gosse* was elegantly translated as "old dear" and *ça gaze* as "there's 'air"; and there was a noise by a superlatively real jazz-band.

But Sir Charles Tyack was blind and deaf to all these attractions: the solitary figure in the stalls held all his attention. Whenever a number was ended, the young man rose and handed a large bouquet of flowers to the conductor from the heap that lay on the chairs beside him. He never applauded or tried to encore a song, but every girl on the stage had a bunch of flowers.

During the interval Tyack left Sumner alone in the gallery. He returned as the curtain rose again.

"It's no good," he said, in a disappointed voice.

"He hasn't left his seat."

"Yes, I know; I went in all the bars to try and run into him: I even had a talk with the box-office man, whose confidence I secured with a cigar. He knows nothing: except that this fellow bought up the theatre some weeks ago: bought all the seats—except the gallery—in the place He doesn't know who he is: not even his name: he paid on the spot, in ten-pound notes, which he brought in a despatch case. After all, as the fellow in the box-office said, all he's got to do is to sell the seats. I can't make head or tail of it: besides, it's such a damn rotten show anyhow."

"It is," murmured Matthew Sumner, "let's go."

"I'm not going to go," said Tyack, contentedly, "until our young friend in the stalls goes: and then I'm going to go with him."

"Better not," urged Sumner; "I know it will end with you talking to him."

"I mean to if I can get half a chance."

"And then he'll tell us why he does all these things."

"That is precisely what I want to find out."

Mr. Matthew Sumner sighed.

The singular possessor of so many seats did not wait to see the moving pictures at the end of the performance: perhaps he had seen them before. He left the stalls under the eye of the President of the French Republic and a few minutes later he was being swiftly carried along the Charing Cross Road followed by two men in a taxi-cab.

There is a small square not a quarter of a mile from Gower Street which is defaced by large hoardings which advertise a number of miscellaneous articles. There are, not uncommonly, spaces to let on these hoardings, and before one of these, a young man in a silk hat was busily at work with a flat brush and a pot of paste. The grey car stood in the shadows of a side street just off the square, and Sir Charles Tyack and Mr. Matthew Sumner were approaching the advertisement hoardings in one direction at the same time as a constable was approaching them in another.

They reached the young man a few moments after the policeman.

"But there is the receipt from Arnold's" the young man was saying, "the space is booked in my name: here's my card. I suppose there is no law against my posting bills at night in a top-hat on a space that I've bought, is there? I'm not collecting a crowd, or making a disturbance."

"It's a rum go, sir," said the mystified official, scratching the side of his head underneath the helmet.

"It's a new form of advertising," replied the other, easily.

"Yes, sir," said the policeman, dubiously.

"From America," added the young man.

The constable's face cleared a little.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," he muttered; he moved off slowly, continuing his beat around the square.

The young man had now completely covered the blank space on the hoarding: his paste-brush in one hand, his high hat tilted to an extreme angle on the back of his head. Then, from a black leather portfolio, of the kind that is carried by Government officials, he drew a bunch of papers. He laid one of the sheets of paper on the back of his paste-brush and, as the two friends came up to him, he slapped it on to the boards with a professional flourish. It lay, a little out of the straight, in the middle of the blank space.

Sir Charles Tyack stopped abruptly. He raised his hat very courteously and said:—

"Sir, to ask questions of a stranger is always an impertinent undertaking. But it is essential that a puff should be understood: and, for that reason, perhaps you will permit me to ask you what you advertise in thus pasting up ten-pound notes on a hoarding at so late an hour as this?"

"Your question, sir," replied the young man, in a very agreeable voice, "is a natural one. It is also easy to answer. I am herein advertising two things: my own folly and the folly of others."

"Perhaps I can understand the first," said Sir Charles, "but the second?"

"The folly of others?" asked the young man, slapping up a number of bank-notes around the first one with great skill and celerity. "How great a number of people will pass here to-morrow and take no notice of this fortune before their eyes."

"I understand, sir, the effect. But I do not understand the cause. To question you further would outrage good manners. Yet I confess I am eaten up with curiosity."

The young man laid down his brush and straightened his back. "I shall be very happy," he said, "to answer any questions that you may ask me in so far as I am able to do so: nor, sir, do I think that your curiosity needs

any apology; for I am conscious that my actions invite it. Before, however, I entertain you with my history, I must ask two things of you: first, your patience while I complete my work on this hoarding; and secondly, gentlemen, your company to supper."

"Your kindness and your courtesy," replied Sir Charles Tyack, "make me ashamed of my inquisitiveness."

'I pray you, speak no more of it: I desire your company, for I am a man who is much alone: moreover, there is no folly so satisfying as that of confiding one's follies to others."

In a very short space of time the young man in the silk hat had pasted up fifty ten-pound notes on the boards: and immediately above them a bill on which was printed in large figures:—

"£500!"

The constable on duty had by now completed his tour of the square and stood behind the three men gaping open-mouthed at the hoarding.

"What will they think of next?" he gasped. "Sticking up imitation ten-quid notes: what's it for, sir?"

"You know the 'Watch this Space!' advertisement, constable? This is the same kind of thing: it's what is called the 'delayed action' method. People see it and wonder what it is and what's going to happen there next, you know."

"Wonderful," muttered the constable. "You never know what these Yankees will do: begging your pardon, sir."

The policeman continued his beat and a few minutes later the three men were travelling westward in the large grey car.

The young man and his two guests sat at a small round mahogany dining-table in the centre of the square comfortable, mid-Victorian room. The walls were distempered in a dark shade of red, surmounted by a narrow white frieze. A large picture in a heavy gilt frame hung

in the centre of each of the four walls. They were not of great beauty or of great value—the execution was exact and conventional: the names of the painters are unknown to-day—but they decorated the room admirably, and in no way distracted the attention of the diners from the particular business for which the room was set apart.

The supper was simple and excellent. The salmon mayonnaise was the work of an artist and the cold pheasant had been cooked to a divided minute. The Bollinger was '06, and the young man, however eccentric in other ways, was proficient in the art of entertaining his guests. He seemed to have seen many places and to have played more than one part on the world's stage in spite of his age, which, at the most, could hardly have been more than thirty-five years. His anecdotes were not too many, nor dull, nor remembered, nor improper to the moment. He seemed to have no political bias, and his views on current affairs were liberal in other than a party sense. He told an anecdote of Monsieur de la Haye with success and a reputable accent, and he showed a knowledge of the Tuscan idiom in describing an adventure at Pienza.

"Let us go into the library and smoke," said the young man, at last.

The room was a long one, with a large fire in an open hearth at the end of it. The walls were lined with a diversity of books. A table of dark oak stood in the centre of the room, on which was a bronze reproduction of the "Spina."

The young man waved his guests to two chairs before the fire. He drew up a third chair between them and beside a small buhl table on which stood a box of cigars, some liqueur glasses and a small flask of an antique design.

"This," he said, "is Courvoisier of '48 and is an excellent thing for the stomach before going to bed: the cigars, I think, you will find agreeable."

He filled the glasses, and his guests having lighted their cigars, he turned to Sir Charles Tyack and said:—

"To keep you longer in suspense were unkind."

"You break a plaster bust in your club," interrupted Sir Charles; "you give flowers fit for a princess to an unknown woman in the street; you are treated for drunkenness by a chemist when yet sober; you engage a theatre for yourself for the worst revue in London; you paste bank-notes upon a hoarding to the tune of £500 . . . it were inhuman to forbear to ask why."

"Ah!" replied the young man, "I knew I had seen your friend somewhere: now I remember. Although the episode of the bust of Aristotle was really outside my programme."

"If you would rather not tell us anything . . ." began Matthew Sumner, in a hesitating voice—"and I feel sure that it were better you did not—it is the last thing that we would wish that you should . . ."

"No, no: it will please me to do so."

For nearly a minute the young man stared into the fire, as though seeking among the images in the embers and in the flames for words and a way of beginning. Suddenly he began: —

"Gentlemen, the most pathetic thing in the world is an artist who fails in his art: for there is no rôle more disreputable than that of him who fails to please. But though there are many arts, each with its particular excellence: each holding for its practitioners a peculiar privilege: each bringing to some number of men a consolation in the midst of distresses and alarms, there is one art which, above all other arts, is most pertinent to the individual and of the highest value to the community; and as this art confers the greatest benefit upon the patient, so is it the most difficult in the practitioner: for this art differs from all others in that the artist who creates and the critic who enjoys are one and the same man. I speak, gentlemen, of the Art of Living."

The speaker paused for a few seconds, drank a little brandy, and continued speaking more easily than before, as if less meticulous in the search of words:—

"John Keats, in one of his letters, wrote that next to

fine doing fine writing was the top thing in the world. I take it that he meant in this not the sentimental heroics that are commonly read into that phrase, but that a well-ordered life was a better thing to achieve than a well-ordered prosody. This confession is of much interest to remember in one who succeeded as eloquently in the one respect, as he failed lamentably in the other, and the words have stuck in my mind.

"To most men, however, the Art of Living is subordinate to the Art of Livelihood: there is a remedial necessity in this: and as it is easier to write a comparatively good *ballade* than comparatively good *vers libre* in respect to the limitations imposed by form, so is it less hard to act happily when one's choice is fettered by the *askesis* of earning a material sustenance, than when one is free to take whatever the world has to offer contributory to the conversation of happiness.

"It has been—my misfortune, perhaps, but on this point I am even now not certain: I may possess a temperamental disqualification—it has been my lot to be constrained in the Art of Living within no such bounds as the need to make money circumscribes around most men. My father made a fortune out of a patent food—Perrenthall's Pabuline will probably be familiar to you from the advertisements—and I was the only child. He died before I left Oxford—my mother died when I was but a few years old and I have but small remembrance of her—and I inherited an income half of which to-day is annually absorbed into the Treasury.

"I think an illuminating subject to set as a thesis for humane students would be 'How to live on £10,000 a year.' With me, at any rate, the question—I borrow from the cinema—gripped me by the throat. It became my fetich, alike my work and my play: it became my art: an art, gentlemen, in which—after a devoted apprenticeship of fourteen years—years during which every day, every hour, nay, every minute has been jealously regarded—it has been proved to be beyond my ability to gain even a medi-

ocre achievement, and in which I have ignominiously failed. In such a failure, I have rightly earned your contempt: and all that is left to me by way of consolation is to be able to claim your pity."

The young man buried his face in his hands.

Sir Charles Tyack said something *banal* about the excellence of the cognac: and Mr. Matthew Sumner was about to say something of the futility of which he was very conscious, when their host began talking again:—

"There is one solution which, of course, will occur to you at once. But it is not a solution in any real sense: it is a complete begging of the question. When the young man was told to sell all that he had and give to the poor, we are told that he went unhappily away. He might, also, to my mind, have gone very angrily away. For he did not receive an answer to his question, which I take to have been, 'How am I to live rightly on £10,000 a year?' It was, of course, like Jesus to make such a reply, who, from the small evidence that is afforded by the gospels, seemed to take an impish delight in giving crooked answers to cross-questions. For mind you, the young man had to sell *all* he had: no *modus operandi* was indicated by which a percentage of his income might be devoted to local charities or a charge made upon it in favour of the National Exchequer: and by parity of reasoning, therefore, the poor man with one pound a year from the penny savings bank had equally to give all he possessed to those poorer than he; and when the poor had received it they too would be in the same boat. It is true that Jesus said also that it was more difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through a needle's eye: but scholars of means have been able to explain this obvious impossibility with reference to a gate in Jerusalem; and, at any rate, such contradictory sayings as 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's' and 'Make unto yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness' leave the question in abeyance. There is little

help in so definite a matter to be gained from the teaching of Jesus.

"It may be—I do not know—that the shadow of Aristotle looms too largely in the critic mind of Oxford. At least to me, the *dicta* of this philosopher became a refuge against the evasions and the dialectics of Jesus. I came to consider that if one was desirous of a rule of life, the μηδὲν ἄγαν of Aristotle was the most workable hypothesis, and on this premise, while I am still at Christ Church, I based the syllogism to order my choice in action.

"A University such as Oxford—and, I suppose, Cambridge—reproduces, with an astonishing fidelity, the world in miniature. It is a microcosm, each detail in which is so admirably placed that the unreality of the stage is hidden from the eyes of the actors. It is only after the lapse of years, when one returns and sits in the auditorium, that one sees that the magic forest is but painted cardboard; the palace, a stage property; the very throne itself, a painted wooden stool; and all the actors, but mummers unable even to amuse the critic yawning in the stalls. But to the actors the mummery is real enough, and so at Oxford I began to order my ingoings and my outgoings on a considered plan. I studied the way of life of others, and I saw an incompleteness: I questioned, and I found ignorance: I analysed action, and isolated a bias.

"I looked around me, and on all sides I saw a specialisation in thought and a consequent limitation in action that led me to despair of my fellows and strengthened me more than ever in my Aristotelian resolution. Where I had hoped to find balance, I found bias: where I sought judgment, I received but a prejudiced assessment: where I looked for a catholic enthusiasm, I met but a fever of the individual tissue.

"Surely, here, above elsewhere, I had a right to expect a cultivation of the διαγωγή or at the least an Aristippian hedonism. If I could not know the sublime sanity of Ictinus, surely I might learn something of the proportions of Vignola: I found but artists in life whose work out-

distanced the bas-reliefs of Hindustan: the prosody of Marinetti: the negroid extravaganzas of a jazz-band.

"I well remember saying to a scholar of great erudition that the Latin footnotes in Gibbon were often entertaining: he replied gravely that he never read them, 'as they were written in such bad Latin': I knew a scientist whose knowledge of the infra-red rays was only equalled by his ignorance of everything else: a mathematician who believed Heminge and Condell to be a firm of manufacturing chemists: an economist who considered Sassoferrato's Madonna the finest picture in the National Gallery: a poet who had never heard of the Poetics: and a theologian who was under the impression that Ingres was a Parisian pornographic artist and a contemporary of Kirschner.

"Everywhere I found a deep erudition in one respect and ignorance in all others: I decided to inform myself on another plan. . . .

"After three years at Oxford, I came down with a degree the moderation in which was commendably Aristotelian: but I had achieved other experiences. I could make a break of forty on occasion and my mashie shots had been praised by McDarvin. I had taken a minor part in the O.U.D.S.; and had become a committee man at the Union. I had rowed in the third boat, edited a paper, gained the temporary affections of a member of the Gaiety chorus and published a thin volume of poems—at my own expense. I had learnt enough of motor-cars to drive one: of horses to ride one: of wines to pay for them: and of the Gallic idiom to spend money in the French capital with ease and despatch. I knew enough Latin and Greek to be at no loss for a tag: of chemistry to fudge a day's analysis: of mathematics to solve a simple integration: of English letters to confound the *littérateur;* and of medicine to retain the services of an experienced practitioner as soon as there was the slightest thing wrong with me.

"From the time I went down from Oxford to the outbreak of the late war in 1914, I spent the greater part of

my time out of England. I learnt to speak French fluently: I learnt a little Spanish: a little Italian: and enough German to ask for what I wanted at an hotel, a railway station or a beer-hall. I took my baccalauréat as a student of letters at the University of Montpellier, and spent six months in research work in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, the results of which have not yet been published.

"I climbed an undistinguished peak in the Pyrenees and read a paper on it before the Alpine Club: escaped from brigands in Corsica: and fought a duel with a Polish count.

"In 1914 I was in the Army. I achieved a moderate distinction. I was once slightly wounded and once mentioned in despatches: I received the Military Cross and, when demobilized, I held the rank of Major in the Intelligence Corps.

"Gentlemen," said the young man, after a pause, and in sadder accents than he had hitherto used, "there are two aspects of the Aristotelian rôle that may have escaped you. I said a little while ago that the Christian theoretic is indefinite: I can say now that the injunction of Aristotle is no more definite. The gamut of human conduct is infinite. Μηδὲν ἄγαν is but to steer a middle course, and the middle of infinity, as any mathematician will tell you, is in itself infinite. Pilate asked Jesus, 'What is truth?': it is equally pertinent to ask the philosopher with what compasses he proposes to partition infinity.

"The other side of this affair is the material effect of this diathesis. To exceed in nothing is but to exceed in not exceeding. For more than a dozen years I have endeavoured to do nothing too much: I have only succeeded in doing everything too little. Is there any need for you to ask me why I am now wasting my substance in the most foolish manner that I can conceive? It is not easy to hire a theatre to oneself except for a bad play, so I pray you do not pillory my taste in the matter of the music-hall I chose. To be treated medicinally for insobriety is but

the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace, in which the state of my stomach precludes me from indulging with any reasonable pleasure; but we are all symbolists at heart. Is there a more expeditious or a more foolish way of wasting money than in covering a hoarding with bank-notes? If you can think of any, I shall be grateful to you for your advice in the matter. You will see that the Christian *mythos* has, after all, been too much for me: but I have improved upon the method of Jesus, and instead of selling all I have and giving it to the poor, I am, with the exception of some small indiscriminate charity, giving it to the rich: so that it may be still less likely for me to be over-crowded when I shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The business of the bust of Aristotle was, I regret to say, the result of a sudden impulse: a cheap iconoclasm of which I am already ashamed. The mere expense involved in replacing the bust—I think that must be the bill from the club on the mantelpiece; allow me to open it—can hardly perceptibly accelerate the dissipation of my fortune."

The young man had torn open the envelope: he stared with wide-open eyes at the paper he held in his hand: he seemed to find it difficult to speak. At last, with a laugh that sounded oddly in the ears of his hearers, he threw the bill across to Sir Charles Tyack.

"I suppose we must credit God with a sense of humour," he said slowly.

Sir Charles adjusted his glasses and read:—

"To H. K. Perrenthall, Esq.,

"Replacing of plaster cast of bust of Plato—£5 16*s*."

CHAPTER X: THE HUMOROUS REMEMBERERS OF A WEDDING DAY

THE sun had not yet set, but still hung like a great disc of polished copper a few inches above the water's edge. The sea was without waves or any ripple and ended on the sky-line, as though it had been cut off with a sharp knife drawn along a ruler that was mathematically straight. The sea was so smooth as to seem a solid plane across which one might walk easily for a number of miles, to fall off its edge, behind which the sun was sinking, as one might fall off a rampart or the rim of the world. Between the sun and the sea sand lay a roadway paved with red gold, bordered each side with large flats of silver, which died away into the north and into the south into wastes of baser metals: to an amalgam: to nickel and antimony: to grey iron and to lead. There was no cloud in the sky: no sail in sight: no breath of wind to stir the light white petals of the syringa that lay scattered around the bushes in the green tubs, which stood like sentinels at measured intervals along the terrace by the sea.

The air was heavy with the sweet smell of flowers, and the great stillness of the evening was unbroken save by the murmur of a few late-returning bees, but to be heard as one passed the syringa trees. But presently, as the sun sank behind the edge of the sea, until it looked like a new copper penny cut in half, the stillness of the long terrace was broken by the voice of one singing in the house. The windows of the drawing-room were wide open, and Mr. Matthew Sumner paused in his walk that he might hear better music and the words.

The voice was a contralto, and, though it was of no great volume, was fine in quality, and the piano was subordinate and almost in tune.

"Alone upon the house-tops, to the North
I turn and watch the lightning in the sky,—
The glamour of thy footsteps in the North,
Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!"

the voice sang, and Mr. Matthew Sumner came a few paces nearer to the window.

"Below my feet the still bazaar is laid,
Far, far below the weary camels lie,—
The camels and the captives of thy raid,
Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!

"My father's wife is old and harsh with years,
And drudge of all my father's house am I.—
My bread is sorrow and my drink is tears,
Come back to me, Beloved, or I die!"

The long-drawn-out notes on the last word hung upon the evening air: there was not only quality in the voice, there was also the sincerity of passion, that awoke memories in the heart of Sumner which were at most times comfortably asleep, and which led him to move even nearer to the window in order that he might see something of the singer. But there was no light in the room, and in the shadow all that Sumner could see, without a breach of good manners, was a slender figure seated on the music-stool—for the singer was also the accompanist—and a tall man in white flannels standing behind her.

Thrice Matthew Sumner paced the length of the terrace, hoping that the woman might sing again. But all the world lay silent: even the bees by now had gone home to bed and the sun had slipped out of sight behind the other side of Earth; and the pathway of gold across the waters had turned to blood, and the opal and the silver were dying out of the sea. Matthew Sumner stepped up to the window and found the room empty. He looked at his watch.

"Time to change," he muttered to himself.

He turned, and watched for a few seconds the fading colour on the waters, and then, humming the air he had just heard softly to himself, he walked slowly into the house.

The Hôtel Mornay is very rightly proud of its large dining-room: with its long windows opening on to the terrace: its wonderful carpet: its ceiling painted by Jean Mourot; and certainly there are few, if any, hotels in the Riviera which possess so fine a room to dine in or that can dish up so excellent a dinner. The Hôtel Mornay —in spite of its tariff—is always full: and even, on this night, at the end of the season, all the tables in the large room were occupied.

Matthew Sumner sat at a small table between two of the windows, and at his left hand was a table at which sat two people, who held his attention for more reasons than one. They had come into the dining-room several minutes after Sumner had sat down at his table, and even before they had entered Sumner's eye had been caught by their table, which was near to his and almost covered in flowers. A bucket containing a bottle of champagne stood at the side of the table on a high stand, which was decorated with long, trailing tendrils of smilax. In the centre of the table itself, there was a large silver bowl full of the most lovely roses Sumner had ever seen: roses of the most delicate shade of pink, with large creamy petals opening outwards and giving forth a fragrance of which Matthew Sumner was conscious even at his table several feet away.

There is a charm to simple-minded people in staying at an hotel. In whatever circle one lives: however catholic may be one's tastes: however numerous one's acquaintances: however hospitable one's friends; there is a limitation in experience; and, to some degree at least, an approximation to type among the few or many that one meets. But at an hotel—and more than ever at such a cosmopolitan caravansera as the Hôtel Mornay—there is no limiting

condition—unless it be that of the ability to pay one's bill: and even that is not always, perhaps, a bar to the ingenious. Here is to be found all the world and his wife: all the world and somebody else's wife: all the world and his mistress: for hotel proprietors are broad-minded folk, who do not require to see marriage certificates at the ceremony of filling up the hotel register. As long as guests behave with propriety: so long as they do not outrage good manners or the accepted customs of the place: in so far as they respect the comfort and the convenience of others; and are neither too boorish nor too inquisitive—it is no business of the host to inquire into what takes place behind the doors of which the guest holds the keys. The bedroom, the sitting-room, the suite, is very rightly sacrosanct, and those who are expert in the exercise may even eat peas with their knife in retirement so long as they do not exhibit a cut lip in the public rooms.

There are people who are in the habit of forming a party and thus staying gregariously at an hotel: but though this is a comfortable business for folk of so empty a mind that they find it tiresome to be alone, it takes the edge off the adventure of the visit. One must stay alone at an hotel to enjoy fully the two benefits that are most advertised in such houses: the benefit of rest and the benefit of change.

To Mr. Matthew Sumner, the dining-room of the Hôtel Mornay was full of interest: he had not, it may be, too complex a mind: for it always entertained him to watch so many others, whose faces were strange to him, whose affairs he did not know, whose names he knew but from the visitors' book, and whose habitations, by such generalities as London, Paris or New York. But though, this evening, he had glanced around the room more than once, the table next to him held his regard. The flowers upon it were enough, in themselves, to attract the notice of the curious. Even in so ceremonious an eating-place as the Hôtel Mornay, where not to dine in dress would have brought about the expulsion of the offender, this particular

table was clearly laid for a ceremony. But when the diners came up to the table and sat down, Sumner was conscious of some sense of disappointment. The two at the table—and there were only two—were so like any other two that might have dined at some other table not buried in flowers, that a little sigh escaped from the lips of Mr. Matthew Sumner and would surely have made flicker the candleflame that lighted his table, had that been a material candleflame and not a metallic filament encased in glass.

The man and the woman at the table were both English. The man was fair, and with a quantity of thick, curly hair, reddish-gold in colour—that gave little chance of a parting or hope of lying down under the hairbrush. He was clean-shaven; his nose was ridged slightly in the centre and his chin was firmly moulded without being unduly prominent. He was handsome in rather a negative way, and was probably adored by his servants. "Cleanly bred, machinely crammed," muttered Matthew Sumner into his moustache, and without looking any more closely at the man, he felt certain that he knew the clubs to which he belonged: the meetings he attended: the name of his tailor: his barber: and his bootmaker: the books that he read (the tales of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Rider Haggard: *The Tramp Abroad* and, certainly, *Mr. Jorrocks*); and even the wines that he would drink: the name on the bands of the cigars that were still in his coat pocket: the make of the pipe that he smoked: as well as the three Public Schools and the two Universities, one out of each of which had helped to mould his features, to form his manners and to constrain his mind.

As Mr. Matthew Sumner knew the man, so also did he know the woman. Otto Weininger divided the female sex (he does not accept that nomenclature, but it must serve in these unscientific papers) into the two types: the mother type and the prostitute type. Had Sumner been so foolish as to accept this dichotomy, he would have classified the woman at the table filled with flowers as of the

former type. She was fair: there was that of the woods and the sea about her: her hair was rebellious: there was much of it, and it was piled up on her head in a pyramid of uneven diameters from base to apex. She wore a dress of black and silver that had been made by a Paris dressmaker with an English reputation, and carried it as only Englishwomen of county stock know how to mis-carry their clothes. If Matthew Sumner soon turned away from the examination of a man whose thought and doing he knew at a glance so well, his looks dwelt for the quarter of a minute longer upon his wife than the Anglican testator, or even wordly prudence, would have allowed. There are three adjectives in the English tongue descriptive of the worth of women: they are, pretty: handsome: and (in America) attractive: the woman with the unruly hair was none of these: and it is not at all easy to say wherein so modest a man as Matthew Sumner was made to stare more than he should have done; or, indeed, more than he had any notion that he was doing.

When the woman reached the table and saw the roses she cried out aloud:—

"Oh, but how lovely! How sweet of you Gobo!" And she buried her face in a great bunch of the flowers.

"Peggy, to-day we celebrate—we anniverse. We were married five years ago to-day: I can hardly realize it."

The man sat down, and Matthew Sumner heard but little of their talk save parts of sentences: a word here and a word there. But the talk of a man and a woman, married these five years, is hardly likely to be of interest to the stranger. *"Te souviens-tu?"* is a motif that has but an individual appeal; and Sumner did not, indeed, pay any heed to what they were saying or strive to overhear halves of sentences that were lost. Nevertheless, he was strongly attracted to the woman. Her voice he recognized at once as that of the singer whom he had heard sing the "Love-Song of Har Dyal" when he had walked upon the terrace before dinner. Perhaps it was the tone of the voice, some remembered note of passion

still in his mind from the song . . . but it is useless to speculate upon why one man or one woman should hold out to any other a particular appeal. Enough that it was so, in this instance, with Sumner: and he made no attempt to analyse an interest that he realized to be absurd and a little futile. He ate his dinner with rather more haste than did justice to the cook, and left the dining-room while the man and the woman at the table filled with roses were still busy with the pheasant. He sat in a remote corner of the lounge and sipped alternately at a cup of black coffee and a glass of cointreau. He thought, dreamily, upon the woman with the pile of red-brown hair, the large grey eyes and the consoling voice; and then, cursing himself for a fool in the matter strove to find the grace to be pleased that she was thus happily mated and a mother of two children—as he had learnt from scraps of sentences, half-overheard, in the dining-room.

But he found it difficult to banish this image from his mind; and at last, accepting the matter with a shrug of self-resignation, he drank the remainder of the coffee and walked out on to the terrace.

For some time he paced backward and forward. The night was warm and the air was soft with the smell of flowers and the sea. A rising moon, a thin crescent of silver, lay tilted backward upon a low promontory of dark rocks, that stood out like a row of jagged black teeth upon a silver lake, and the night wind, which had sprung up since the setting of the sun, stirred just a little the leaves and the most slender twigs in the tops of trees, and filled the night and the long terrace upon which Matthew Sumner walked with a small murmuring, as of a host of fairies whispering to each other near by: hidden between the stone balustrades of the parapet or in the middle of the thick syringa bushes or behind the green tubs.

He did not care to count afterwards how many times he passed and repassed the drawing-room windows in the hope that the woman who had sung there before might—for by now they must have long since finished dinner—

come and sing there again. At last he gave up this hope; and, in order to drive the affair from his mind, he went into the house, and, clapping his hat on his head with determination and seizing his stick, he set out for the town that lay clustered around the small harbour below.

Louvin-St. Augeac is chiefly notable for the Hôtel Mornay, to which people of means and discrimination return year after year without ever becoming weary of the place. The coast scenery is beautiful, but not more so than at an hundred places along the same littoral: nor is the small town quainter or more picturesque than a round dozen of its neighbours, and the harbour is an object of much cursing in the mouths of skippers of yachts. The Hôtel Mornay, in fact, has "made" Louvin-St. Augeac: so that to-day there is a sea-front ornamented with lamp-posts and white rails, an Établissement des Bains, a Théâtre des Variétés and a Casino.

Mr. Matthew Sumner entered the roulette-room of the Casino about a quarter of an hour after ten o'clock. The room was full, but the tables were not so crowded as to prevent a new-comer from finding a place at the table with pushing and a little patience; and presently Matthew Sumner found himself seated between a fat and elderly man with a bald head and heavy grey eyebrows, that twitched excitedly every time the ball hung above a number, and a tall slim girl with heavy, jet-black hair, a snake-like movement and a frock of a dull gold-brocaded silk, that left uncovered her arms, her shoulders and her back and so much of her breast as was permitted by the conventions of the place.

From time to time, the bald-headed man made hurried entries in a small note-book that he left open on the table at his right hand. After each consulting of these figures in the book his eyebrows would twitch up more angrily than ever, and he would throw upon the board a fresh array of coins and counters. He was of no interest to Sumner: he was familiar: the old roulette player playing and losing on a new system. Matthew Sumner hardly

gave him a glance: he was a type. But if Sumner had left the quiet and great comfort of the Hôtel Mornay for an uncomfortable seat wedged between too many people at a gaming-table in a hot and ill-decorated room in order to be entertained in finding the unusual among the men and women around him, he was unfortunate in the choice of the place into which he had pushed himself at the roulette-board.

For as the man with the eyebrows and the note-book full of figures on his left was known to him and a type, so also was the girl on his right. She wore less clothes and carried them with a better air, perhaps, than most. She was not unhandsome. She was young. But she was a type; and she was true to type in every detail. The little ripples that she made from time to time with the muscles of her back: an allurement and an invitation almost, to any one, not a stick or stone, standing behind her: the heavy gold slave bangle half-way between the elbow and the shoulder on her left arm: the exact arrangement of her bodice so as both to hide and to reveal: her bag of counters slung between rings of ivory: the chain of amber around her neck: her handkerchief, with the little embroidered initials around its edge: the well-known scent of a well-known Paris scent-maker: which I may not indicate more determinately; all these proclaimed her *sui generis,* and Matthew Sumner would have noticed her no more than he noticed the gambler on his left, were it not that he knew the man at her right to whom she was talking and with whom she was playing, for he had seen him only an hour or so before drinking a bottle of champagne at a table full of roses.

If Matthew Sumner won—as he did twice following on a number—or lost—as he did for the remainder of the time he sat at the table—he paid small heed to either matter; nor did the fair-haired man on the girl's right hand seem to notice whether he lost or won. Moreover he made few stakes himself on the board, but was chiefly busied in handling counters to the girl to place on rouge or noir,

pair or impair, or to punt with on a single number, as the mood took her: and he did not watch the fortune that came to her, or eye the ball as it spun slowly and yet more slowly around the circular groove, or hold his breath at all (as the girl did hers) when it hung undecided over a number that bore the louis counters that she had placed upon it. Nor did he cry out with delight (as she did) when it fell, with a last despairing wobble, into dix-sept, and only bestirred himself in the matter to help her rake in the thirty-five counters that accrued, so that, if but for a moment, he might find excuse to touch with his her slender fingers shut tightly round the handle of the rake. But if he did not heed the play or watch the wheel it was not because he was blind, for his eyes were wide open and alight with eagerness and desire, and saw every movement of her lips, every shrug and gesticulation of her white shoulders, the little shadows that played hide-and-seek behind her ears, and the rise and fall of the gold lace that hung so lightly about her from the threads of gold across her shoulders, and the movement in her arms and the white gleam of her teeth as her lips—very red and soft and desirable—parted in a smile.

"*Le sept final,*" she cried; "*ça colle*—eet is—*comme vous dites*—my luckee number—*hein?*—*ce soir.*"

She fixed her large eyes, asleep and yet afire, on his face; and the light that was in his eyes flamed up at the look as an ember will jump suddenly into a blaze when the bellows blow upon it.

Soon Sumner grew weary of the game and out of humour with the table at which he sat. He rose and left the roulette-board and drifted into the room where *trente et quarante* was being played. For a while he played at this table, but he became tired of this also in about a quarter of an hour; and, finding the room hot, and feeling thirsty, he went out into the small hall where drinks were served, and choosing a small table half-hidden behind a tall palm-tree in a tub, he called for the waiter and ordered half a Vichy with a slice of lemon in it.

He had not been sitting there very long, and had sipped but half of the water through one of the two straws provided, when he was awakened from the day-dream into which he had fallen by two people who sat down at the table next to his and called furiously for the waiter.

Their table was a little in front of his and directly under the palm-tree, and he saw, for they were behind and not in front of the palm, that they were the fair Englishman and the dark girl who had sat next to him at the roulette-board.

The waiter came, received his order with a servility that was proportionate to the cost involved, and, in a surprisingly short space of time, returned with a bottle of champagne in a bucket of ice. The bottle was opened with a pop, the wine poured out with a flourish, and the fair young man raised his glass—as he had raised it a couple of hours earlier in the dining-room of the Hôtel Mornay—and drank to the beautiful eyes of a lady whose name he did not know. Of this, Mr. Matthew Sumner was sure, for, after putting down his glass, he asked it.

"Et, comment t'appelles-tu?" he said with an execrable accent.

"Kiki," purred the girl in gold.

"Quel joli nom," he replied, and his right hand sought and clasped the left hand of the girl where it lay in her lap. *"Quel joli nom, comme toi."*

For some minutes Matthew Sumner caught but a word here and there, but as the little imp that is caught and bottled up in gold-necked bottles with so much labour and at so great a cost, being let loose, climbed up into the brains of both of them, there to hobnob with other imps of a like kidney and to persuade the landlords to let these tenants have it all their own way, their talk became louder, until Matthew Sumner could hear easily, at his table, most of what was said.

"Mais, non; ce n'est pas possible, ce soir," the fair man was saying in his abominable French, *"je l'ai dit.*

Il faut retourner à la l'hôtel bientôt: je suis marie: compris?"

"Mais, ma chérie, j'ai de la discrétion, moi. Je assure . . ."

"Non, non, mais, Kiki, écoutez-moi. Demain, j'irai à Nice et je reviendrai ici après-demain: je vais là en auto: viens avec moi: je la conduis, moi-même: il n'y a pas de chauffeur: il faut être discret, tu vois. Tu viendras? Nous serons ensemble toute la journée de demain et la nuit. Nous dinerons au Café Disart et nous coucherons à l'Hôtel Petit-Ritz. N'est-ce pas?"

"Mais, oui, oui: C'est ça—et vous êtes bien gentil, mon chéri. Où vais-je vous rencontrer, demain? J'y viens en costume d'auto?"

"Oui, oui. Sois sur les marches de théatre de la Place, à onze heures demain matin: tu seras là, ma petite Kiki?"

"Sans aucun doute: à onze heures précises."

The Englishman tossed off what little of champagne was left in his glass.

"Bois ça," he demanded.

But the girl sipped at the sparkling liquid in her glass and put it down on to the table still half filled.

"Non. J' ai assez bu, moi: il faut ménager l'estomac."

The fair man filled his own glass to the brim, and putting down the bottle, emptied the glass at a draught. He leant towards the girl and, placing his right hand behind her and gripping her thigh with his left hand, he drew her to him. It has been told, in I know not what legend or by whom recorded in script, that when Apollo kissed Aphrodite roses sprung up in the way and filled all the air with their scent. But all the roses Matthew Sumner remembered to have been on a table at the Hôtel Mornay, were destined to be sold on the morrow, as a perquisite, by the head waiter to a local florist; and no roses burst into flower about the round iron table with the imitation marble top as the lips of Kiki and the lips of Gobo met and kissed; and though the kiss was long, and, indeed, rather a sequence of kisses than one solitary

kiss, yet there lay on the table but a bottle of champagne nearly empty, two glasses and an empty stone matchbox advertising an apéritif, and not so much as the petal of a rose—not so much as a petal of a wild rose.

Matthew Sumner drank up the remainder of the Vichy water a little hurriedly, and left the Casino before the two young people began kissing again: he had no wish further to witness the most commonplace love-making of that most commonplace young man, and he was anxious to avoid any chance of walking up in his company from the town to the high cliff upon which stood the Hôtel Mornay.

The moon had risen higher this past hour in the dome of night and now silvered the open spaces of the earth, and threw black, square shadows of walls and houses and fantastic shadows of streets and trees, like demons and strange animals and knights on horseback, upon the white road. Across this shadow stage walked Matthew Sumner, a little less unhappy than he should have been in the knowledge of human frailty that he had gained in the last two hours.

There were few folk in any of the cities of the world—there was surely none in Louvin-St. Augeac—blessed with a more single mind or a more humble spirit than was Mr. Matthew Sumner. But Sumner was yet human—and though to learn of the perfidy of the husband of a woman to whom one feels strangely compelled, should sadden the heart and oppress the spirit, such an effect is, perhaps, not so often produced as it very rightly and fittingly should be.

There was, it is true, a sorrow in the heart of Matthew Sumner as he climbed up the steep white road to the cliff that hung above the town: so that he hardly noticed the white moths that fluttered over the flowers which grew in the ditch beside the hedgerow, or stayed to admire the leaves of the olive-trees—silver white in the moonlight against the black of the earth—as he otherwise might well have done: nor stepped aside to avoid crushing a

snail under his heel, whose life was thus ended and whose love-making left but begun, owing to the infidelities of a gentleman drinking champagne in the Casino more than a mile away.

But if Sumner was thus moved to walk heedlessly and sorrowfully through the night, yet there was a joy in his heart that would not be denied, however much conscience might look into the matter or even common decency condemn this satisfaction. For Matthew Sumner, in his most inmost self, spoke somewhat in this manner:—

"A woman, whom I have seen but for a moment, and yet whom I know I could love well, is the wife of another man and unhappy in her love for him. I do not know her nor have I spoken to her: and I could not attempt this with any kindliness in my heart were she also loved by him. But I need to be under no obligation to a man who, on the anniversary of his wedding day, foregathers with a harlot, in respect of my care for his wife. By hook or by crook I will try and get to know her: I will woo her; and be under no moral restraint in this in the eyes of God—and a *fico* for society. Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

So, as Matthew Sumner climbed the hill and drew nearer, step by step, to the hotel upon its top, his heart grew lighter and he began to persuade himself that this adventure should have, if by any means he could compass it, a happy ending both for her and for him.

The hope to console is not the most unkindly hope which a man may guard in his heart, and in this matter Matthew Sumner may be forgiven, who wished for so few things among much temptation and dismay.

He reached the hotel at last, and being unwilling to employ the lift-man at this hour of the night—for it was already past eleven o'clock—he walked up the broad staircase and along the many corridors that led to his room in the west wing. He wondered idly, as he passed a great number of closed doors, behind which of them

slept the wife of the man whom he had left still in the Casino.

At last he came to his own room, and, searching in his pocket for the key, presently opened the door and went in. He switched on the electric light, and feeling already weary with his uphill walk, he threw himself down into the easy-chair in the corner of the room. He looked about him, glad to be once more alone within four walls, and fell to wondering how soon he would fall asleep, or if he would lie awake into the morning debating the matter that had filled his mind all the evening. Still feeling thirsty, he went to fill a glass of soda-water from the syphon on the table, when, lying near the tray, and standing out against the dark table-cloth, he saw an envelope. A number was scrawled on the outside, and without noticing this more carefully—for he took the letter to be but an hotel bill—he tore open the envelope.

He took out and unfolded the half-sheet of note-paper, and holding it under the light of the reading-lamp he read, with a growing amazement, that which was written therein. This was the letter that he read:—

"TEDDY DEAR:

"To-morrow the Goblin man goes to Nice—to see about a horse—and he will not be back until the day after to-morrow: so come to my room, you know my number, to-morrow night at eleven o'clock. Don't knock, just scratch on the door; so that I will know it's you and let you in quickly: I shall be listening ever so hard, and I will hear you. I packed G. off to the Casino after dinner, so that I might write this letter in peace. Be sure you aren't seen when you scratch at my door: I simply exist until to-morrow night.

Your loving,
"PEGGYKINS.

"P.S.—G. was *so* sentimental this evening: and I was *so* bored. You would have laughed if you'd seen us."

Matthew Sumner never quite knew how long he sat and stared at that letter. At last, he picked up the envelope: and then, taking a new envelope from the side table, he placed the letter in it, sealed the envelope and inscribed it with a number. He then rang the bell.

"C'n'est pas pour moi, cette lettre-ci," he said to the sleepy waiter. *"Regarde l'enveloppe, là: c'est adressé au numéro* 175; *c'n'est pas* 155."

"Ah, pardon, Monsieur a raison. Mais il est facile de confondre le chiffre sept anglais et le chiffre cinq français. Je vais apporter la lettre au numéro cent soixante quinze. Merci, Monsieur: bonsoir, Monsieur."

Matthew Sumner was not a long time in getting into bed: but daylight had silvered the window-panes before he fell into a sleep troubled with dreams.

CHAPTER XI: THE HAPPY HISTORY OF THE YOUNG LADY AT MAWREEN

MR. MATTHEW SUMNER jumped up from his chair and held open the dining-room door for Miss Trevannon. He closed the door softly after her and walked back to the table. Mr. Jardine rose, and taking the stopper out of the decanter, walked around the table to his guest and filled his glass. He returned to his chair, and, having filled his own glass, placed the decanter in front of him, most carefully and with an almost mathematical exactness upon the centre line of the table. He replaced the stopper in the neck of the decanter. He sipped, ceremoniously, of the ruby liquid in the glass.

"You will, I think, appreciate this, Mr. Sumner," he said, in a gentle voice, "it is some of the '87, of which I have, happily, several bottles still remaining. It is not a vintage that one meets commonly nowadays."

"It is very fine indeed," replied Matthew Sumner.

"Will you have an apple? Let me choose one for you. This is a Cox's Pippin; and home-grown: or will you have some nuts?"

Mr. Matthew Sumner peeled his apple and spoke of the beauty of the country in which his host lived.

"Yes, I think this is the best part of Hampshire," said Mr. Jardine. "The ground is high, and situated as we are here on the edge of the ridge, we get all the benefit of the sea air from the Channel sweeping over the forest. Hampshire is said to be a relaxing country, but the high ground here and around Greame and Pelliard is very different from the New Forest, low-lying and all shut it with trees, and the coast of the Solent and the

estuary. 'Mawreen' could hardly have been built on a better site."

"Did you build this house, Mr. Jardine?" inquired Sumner, politely.

"No, no. It was built about seventy years ago by a Mr. Doone, who, I believe, made a considerable fortune in South Africa, and when he retired and came back to England he picked out this spot to build on, because of the view: he was used to the veldt, I understand, and had a love of large open spaces and a dislike to being shut in in any way in a hollow or by trees. The view here is really very fine: you couldn't see anything of it this evening, as it was dark when you arrived, but you will see it to-morrow morning."

"I shall look forward to enjoying it," murmured Matthew Sumner.

"There is one blot on the landscape," continued his host, "they've built an aerodrome on the common land outside Harbury—half-a-dozen great galvanized-iron monstrosities: it's an eyesore in the landscape, sir. I don't believe in all this flying. In the first place, it's most dangerous, whatever the newspapers say: why, I saw in the paper only to-day that a passenger aeroplane to Brussels—or was it Antwerp?—has crashed and killed two or three people. People travelled about far too much as it was before these abominations came in."

"I suppose, though, the same thing was said about motor-cars," said Sumner.

"I don't think there's much to be said for motor-cars either," snorted Mr. Jardine. "Nuisances on the roads: running over people: raising dust. I don't approve of motor-cars at all."

"But you have a car, Mr. Jardine?"

"Yes, of course, it brought you from the station to-night. You see, when one is three or four miles from the station . . . I don't deny they're useful . . . but I don't know that I would have got one if it hadn't been for Humphrey . . . he's working in the War Office

now, you know: he generally comes down week-ends, and it's very convenient for him."

Mr. Jardine continued to talk in this manner and upon a number of subjects of no great importance, while Mr. Matthew Sumner cracked his nuts between a large pair of silver-plated nut-crackers and sipped comfortably at his port. If he was bored, as he was, with the talk of his host, he was too polite to show it, but listened with patience to a prejudiced opinion and many inaccuracies in statement without inattention or dissent: for in the first place, he was a guest; and secondly, he made, as all just and reasonable men should make, excuse in respect to age: for Mr. Theodore Jardine was seventy-five years old. The room in which the two men sat at the mahogany dining-table was rectangular in shape and papered with a dark wall-paper of a pattern composed of large indiscriminate whirls a shade darker in hue than the ground colour of the paper. There was a large oil painting of some cows in a stream, by a Victorian artist of repute in his time but forgotten now, over the fireplace: the remaining pictures on the walls were two small oils of "still life" and some large engravings of the English cathedrals. The furniture was heavy, ugly and had been expensive when bought, and in a corner by the fireplace was a gilt cage on a small round table: the cage was covered with an embroidered cloth and inside the cage was a paroquet, which advertised its presence by occasionally polishing the vertical bars of the cage with its beak.

Mr. Theodore Jardine suited admirably the room in which he dined. He was a man with an eminently practical mind—at least, he was in the habit of saying that he was—and he still spoke of the '51 exhibition with respect. He did not profess to understand art—indeed, he did not consider art, with the exception of portrait painting and the design and decoration of ecclesiastical buildings, as quite a respectable performance. He was a widower, his wife having died many years before the date of Matthew Sumner's visit, and Humphrey—who was a professional

soldier—was his only child. He was a Conservative in politics, though his Toryism was of a brand that might have been considered reactionary thirty years ago. He was no scholar, albeit he was able to misquote a few of the better known classical tags: most often *"Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume,"* which he was used to scan at three dactyls and a trochee, accenting *Postume* on the penultimate. He had been at Oxford in the 'sixties and was fond of recounting an anecdote about Jowett which had been a stock story these forty years as having happened in connection with himself. His father had built up a sound business in the making of oils and varnishes, and Mr. Theodore Jardine had been nominally a director of, and actually a sleeping partner in the firm of Hardy, Jardine and Goole for nearly sixty years. He was in no sense of the word a man of affairs, although he had his finger in more than one financial pie of a charitable nature, and yearly strained the vicar's tact to breaking-point in the muddling of Church accounts—for Jardine was a churchwarden. It was, as it happened, in connection with the administration of a charity of which Sumner was a trustee that he was now staying at Jardine's house.

As a churchwarden and the most influential man in the village, it was not his financial incompetence alone that was a trial to the vicar. Jardine's views on the Anglican ritual were definite, very forcibly adhered to and variable in only the narrowest limits. He was neither High Church nor Low Church: the former he considered immoral; the latter as not decent: and so sometimes the Creed was sung and sometimes not, according to the slight warp towards Rome or dissent that the Colonel's faith took at the time: for the vicar was a worthy and impecunious man who dared not offend a wealthy benefactor in a poor parish.

In speaking of Mr. Jardine as the Colonel one is strictly in error; but nearly every one in Ruan Abbas so did: for the title pleased Mr. Jardine not a little. There was colour for this in that, in the 'seventies, Theodore Jardine

had held a captaincy in a Volunteer regiment; but for Ruan Abbas, he remained, or rather became, the Colonel.

In figure, he was tall, but stooped slightly: his hair was white, and a white, carefully trimmed moustache added a distinction to an otherwise somewhat commonplace face. He dressed habitually in rather a formal manner, and on Sundays his frock-coat and white hair were conspicuous in the pew beneath the pulpit in the church of Ruan Abbas. He was said to be the handsomest man in that part of the world, and the two elderly maiden ladies—the Misses Brimley-Vaughan—who lived in the long white house beyond the pond, used to say that he read the lessons with the grand air: this he most certainly must have done, for in the Vaughans' pew, some dozen pews away from the lectern, his voice was quite inaudible: but, then, as Miss Adela Brimley-Vaughan used to say, you can always follow the lesson in your Bible.

Mr. Theodore Jardine finished his glass of port: he made a motion to pour out another glassful for his guest; but Sumner waved a hand in refusal.

"Then shall we go into the drawing-room and have some coffee?"

Mr. Matthew Sumner agreed and presently took a small Dresden cup from the hands of the young lady who had sat opposite him during dinner: he had been introduced to her on his arrival: her name was Trevannon, and Sumner understood her to be the Colonel's niece. She was tall and dark, with hair that was parted in the centre and pulled down tightly on each side of her head and back over her ears: her face was oval rather than round, and her expression a little hard: at least, so it seemed to Matthew Sumner.

The drawing-room was an uncomfortable room with too much furniture in it, and there was no attempt at any ordered scheme of decoration. Here was a Japanese table covered with an odd assortment of curios, and there a Chippendale table carrying three elephants, graduated in size and carved out of white ivory. There was a

mirror on the mantelpiece in a frame of velvet and shells, which looked peculiarly out of place between the two brass sconces that flanked it on either side. From the centre of the ceiling hung a large chandelier ornamented with hundreds of long, triangular pieces of glass, and against the wall, at the far end of the room from the fire-place, there stood a tall cabinet of carved walnut, filled with a miscellany of china: against the wall opposite the windows was an upright piano that looked—Sumner could not have explained how this was so—as though it was never played.

Mr. Matthew Sumner did not remember when he awoke next morning of what he and Jardine and Miss Trevannon had talked during the half-hour that he had sat in the drawing-room. It must have been more commonplace than is usual even in such circles as that in which Colonel Jardine moved, or than is found in such occasions as when Matthew Sumner stayed for a while in that improbable drawing-room and drank coffee with his host and his niece before he adjourned to the library for the serious business connected with the Arthur Killigrew Bequest.

The library of "Mawreen" was lined with a number of books that Theodore Jardine's father and Theodore Jardine himself had bought with an eye more to their bindings than to their contents. A catalogue of these volumes would in no way have equipped the reader with an insight into the mind of Jardine: for he read little save the *Times,* the *Spectator* (occasionally), the parish magazine and such reports of charity commissions as were either pertinent to his affairs or sufficiently out of date to merit his attention. He also read the novels of Anthony Trollope; and, of the moderns, Mr. W. W. Jacobs—whom he was wont to quote in his lighter moments, and whose humour he always characterized as being "healthy, sir; eminently healthy." But Trollope and Jacobs filled only one shelf in his library: and the remaining books there: bound series of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* and the *Guardian:* Gibbon's *Rome* and Hume's

England: a long series of the Latin classics: a litter of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century nonetities such as Kirk White, Blair, Knight: many of the contributors to Dodsley and so forth: bound volumes of *Punch:* the complete works of Dickens, of Disraeli, and of Thackeray: these and a host of others with whose names and titles the Colonel himself was not familiar, were only taken out from their shelves to be dusted, at stated intervals, by the trusted parlour-maid, Mrs. Brayton, who, for so many years, had been a mainstay in the domestic arrangements of Mr. Theodore Jardine.

The most noticeable piece of furniture in the library was a large and elaborate desk: a desk laden with wicker trays full of papers and backed with a rampart of pigeonholes and small drawers and locked cupboards: for Mr. Jardine, like so many men with nothing of any importance to do, made a great show of being a busy man. In a corner, beside one of the book-cases, were a number of black japanned boxes on which were stencilled the titles of the subject-matter to which the papers in the boxes referred. One of these boxes held the papers and documents referring to the Killigrew Bequest. It is not germane to this history to detail the conditions of the bequests of the late Arthur Killigrew, Esq., gentleman, of Couldan Hall in the county of Wiltshire, nor to explain precisely why it was necessary that Mr. Matthew Sumner and Colonel Jardine should spend a long evening at a table littered with papers. It is enough for the continuity of these events to say that some sort of order was at last won out of a chaos, and that half-an-hour after midnight all these many letters and documents were safely stowed away again in the black tin box, lettered with the name of Arthur Killigrew, and Matthew Sumner was on his way to bed.

Sumner was soon in bed and asleep, for his tussle with the disordered papers and the old man's obstinacy and incompetence had tired him out. He awoke in the morning to the song of many birds, to bright sunlight streaming

into the room and to the scent of flowers and green trees and the good brown earth blown in to him through the open casement. He lay in bed, in an agreeable condition between sleeping and waking, until he was called: and, having bathed and dressed, was presently eating a large breakfast under the administration of his host and Miss Trevannon.

After breakfast Jardine took his guest into the library and, having given him a cigar, led him out into the garden. The month of May had just ended and the garden at "Mawreen," which was full of shrubs and flowering trees, was looking its best. The two almond-trees that stood at each end of the croquet lawn were in full flower and very beautiful to look upon: the laburnam-trees were a mass of gold, and a Judas-tree, of which Jardine was proud and about which he was more than usually prolix, was already strewing the trim gravel path over which it leaned with a thousand purple petals.

For some three parts of an hour Mr. Matthew Sumner walked in the garden of "Mawreen" and listened to the talk of his host, making such answers as the occasion and his sense of good manners suggested, and admiring the trees and the flowers and the design of the parterres, and above and over all, the great view of the forest that lay stretched out below the high ground upon which the house had been built. But at last Mr. Theodore Jardine brought his guest back to the house and with many excuses left him to be entertained by his niece. He explained at great length and in an hyperbole of apology the need for his attendance that morning at a meeting in connection with the Church Room, of which building the Colonel was a trustee. At last, after showing impatience in the matter of his coat and complaint as to the state of his silk hat—which was as glossy and as well-kept as any hat need have been—he set out for the village; not a little to the relief of Matthew Sumner.

The South African Doone who had built "Mawreen" had clearly been influenced in his design by the colonial

model: for a broad verandah ran around the house on three of its sides. In this verandah sat Matthew Sumner, looking out over the great expanse of wood and moorland that stretched beneath him. In another chair, at his left, sat Miss Trevannon, knitting busily and saying little, for which grace, after the loquacity of the Colonel, Matthew Sumner was not a little grateful.

He asked and obtained from Miss Trevannon permission to light his pipe, and for some time he sat smoking very contentedly in silence and at peace with the world, enjoying so fully the beauty of the landscape before him.

The faintest mist hung over the forest, adding a mystery to the shape of trees, but the low hills, many miles away to the west, were clearly outlined against the blue sky, and to the south, in the far horizon, a thin gleam of silver showed the beginnings of the sea. There was a sea freshness in the air as well as the forest smells, and as Matthew Sumner snuffed it up, until his lungs were filled with it, he grew every minute more content more forgetful of defects, more easily to be persuaded of the love of God. And at length, so full was his heart of happiness that was born but of the sunshine, the vision of woods and hills and the far waters, and of sea smells and wood smells and the smell of wild thyme and wet hollows, of almond blossom and water mint, of oaks and beeches and elder-bushes and mosses and lichens and streams and stones and the mingled sweetness of an hundred flowers, that he could no more be silent, but spoke in praise of these things to the woman who sat beside him.

Miss Trevannon put her knitting carefully down upon the small table beside her before she answered: she then half turned in her chair towards Mr. Matthew Sumner, and looking at him fixedly, said very gravely:—

"And so you think this spot most beautiful, Mr. Sumner?"

"I do. It is glorious—particularly this morning. Isn't it lovely? Look at the green of those young birch-

trees and the dark greens and browns of that swampy bit of ground to the left: and even your uncle's *bête noire,* the sheds of the aerodrome, look jolly and fascinating and mysterious in this sunshine."

"It is lovely," said Miss Trevannon. "Would you like to live here, Mr. Sumner?"

"I cannot conceive a more delightful spot."

"Then I must qualify my question. Would you like to live here, Mr. Sumner, and be, to all intents and purposes, unable to go anywhere else? Would you like to live here day in and day out, year in and year out, winter and summer, spring and autumn, and never move out of a circle ten miles in diameter whose centre is the village of Ruan Abbas—except for a few weeks' visit a year to a relative and an occasional day's shopping in London?"

"I—I really don't know," stammered Matthew Sumner, for Miss Trevannon had spoken so suddenly and so quickly and with so great an emphasis that Sumner was too astounded to be able to make, at the moment, any adequate reply to these questions. But Miss Trevannon gave him no time to find anything more suitable to say.

"You wouldn't," she continued, passionately, "you wouldn't. You'd hate it. You talk of the loveliness of this place. But no place is lovely if you can't get out of it. I have never been to Switzerland, which I am told is beautiful, yet I know a woman who lives there and cannot get away—she is consumptive—who hates the beautiful mountains among which she lives as bitterly as the prisoner hates the four walls of the cell within which he is confined. Heaven, I suppose, is beautiful; but if the angels are forever made to walk in those Elysian fields they must grow to loathe them as fiercely as their fallen comrades do the cinder banks of Hell."

"Yes, Miss Trevannon, I see what you mean, and, however pleasant any place may be, to be always in that one place may become a burden and a discontent. But I am not so sure whether . . . I know I am talking plati-

tudes, but isn't there some quality of the mind which works for dissatisfaction?"

"Yes—yes," said Miss Trevannon, looking steadily at Mr. Matthew Sumner, as though she would see with her material eye the thoughts and conclusions forming in his brain. But Sumner was not to be put out by a trick of the eye: for he was now on familiar ground and words were coming easily to his lips:—

"The art of happiness," he continued, "is not dependent, in any way, upon happenings and external surroundings. Mere physical freedom is an accidental: it has but little relation to happiness. It is justly said that the ideal good to a man with the toothache is the state of not having toothache. There is no escaping these physical limitations. However great be the diameter of that circle within whose circumference the agent moves, he is not free: and if his temperament, from which there is no division, so orders it that he knows he is not free, no widening of the legs of that imaginary compass will bring him any contentment, though it rotates upon the Pole itself and draws its pencil around the Equator."

Mr. Matthew Sumner paused, carried away a little by his own eloquence, and then continued, more pleased than ever with his theme and his manner of treating it:—

"It is commonly said, I believe, that travel broadens the mind: I do not know whether or no this is so: I sometimes think it tends to narrow the mind: but anyhow, it does not bring peace to the restless: it does not cure the wanderlust, save for a moment: which disease will return to torture the patient with a four-fold strength with every indulgence of the impulse; I who have wandered much, have, at least, learnt this. One cannot be free simply by unlocking the door and walking out of one's cell: one steps but from a smaller into a larger prison. The only way to be free is not to wish to be free. As long as one must eat when hungry and drink when thirsty and sleep when tired, so long must . . ."

"I seem to have heard this before," interrupted Miss Trevannon.

"I know—I admit—I am speaking platitudes," said Mr. Sumner, and his tone of voice betrayed his annoyance at the comment and at being cut short in the middle of a period.

"Yes: but I would tell you a story. You will not be bored if I tell you a story? A true story?" asked Miss Trevannon, frowning at Sumner.

"Surely I shall not," replied Matthew Sumner, earnestly; and Miss Trevannon's face cleared at his obvious sincerity and a smile hung for a moment on her lips.

"Very well: I will tell you a story. But as it is to be a true story, I warn you at once that it will be a dull story. I shall call it, for want of a better title, 'The Story of the Unbeautiful Princess in the Unenchanted Castle.'

"Once upon a time there lived in a castle, which was not a real castle, but a stucco house in Surbiton, a king and queen who were not a king and queen, but a stockbroker and his wife: and to them was born a princess, who was not a real princess, but an ordinary child with a snub nose and too large a mouth and a bad temper. But as I wish to retain the romantic form; and as, also, to all children to begin with, houses are castles, and parents kings and queens, this ordinary child will hereinafter be referred to as the princess—and her brothers also shall be princes of the blood.

"The castle was called 'The Acacias'—perhaps because there were no acacia-trees within a mile of it—and was haunted with fairies and elves and ogres and visited by all manner of great, noble and marvellous persons until the princess was six years old, and then, one by one, the ogres and the elves and the fairies went away (perhaps because the king had bought on a rise and men were in repainting and repapering the castle) and later the noble and miraculous visitors left off coming, until the princess no longer thrilled with excitement as she entered the drawing-room to shake hands with Mrs. Bartholomew or old Miss Jeffries

from the 'The Gables' or Uncle Harold or Uncle George or Mr. Pennyfold, who was partner with the king.

"As the princess grew older she discovered that the castle in which she had lived for ten years was, after all, not a castle, but a house like other houses—a house, moreover, not so good as other houses—as 'Mayrigg Hall' for instance, where she sometimes went to tea—and she wondered why her father, who was such a clever and so powerful a man—if not quite a king—had not chosen a better castle in which to live. But when she grew yet a few years older she began to think that perhaps her father was not quite so clever as she thought he was, nor so important a person, and it seemed that it was possible to 'buy on a fall' instead of 'buying on a rise,' and for a while there was talk of another house, smaller even than the one that was smaller than 'Mayrigg Hall,' and the princess and the three princes played together through a hot August in the square garden of 'The Acacias' and the streets of Surbiton instead of on the long beaches and adventurous sand-hills of Woolacoombe Bay. But this matter eventually righted itself, and next year Babs, for that was the princess's name, and her three brothers spent a delirious month amidst the woods and on the wide beach of Studland. In all good fairy stories the princess must meet the fairy prince; and so did this princess (though this is not a good fairy tale); and what place could be better chosen for this encounter than the golden sands and the heather and the pine-woods that lie to the west of the harbour of Poole? The princess was then thirteen years old and the fairy prince a few years older, and for many days the prince and the princess played together on the sea-shore and clambered about the sandy cliffs and explored the untrodden woods and behaved, I must confess, with quite considerable impropriety, until the queen-mother discovered them one day and talked to the princess severely and made her cry: and the princess saw no more of the fairy prince, but presently returned to Surbiton and a little later was

packed off to school. This school was a large, ugly brick building, just outside a small country town, and there were there thirty-seven other princesses besides the Princess Babs.

"The princess remained at the school for four or five years: and each year her skirts grew longer, and her hair, which had been a loose and untidy mane, was gathered up into a straight and unlovely plait, which at a later date was shortened and thickened into a shape resembling a door-knocker, until the auspicious day came when it was gathered up altogether and coiled upon the back of her head. During these years she was not unhappy. She learnt a number of things, all of which she forgot soon after she returned home. She was taught history and geography as these sciences were understood at 'Orwell House,' and could cite correctly at the end of term the dates of the Battle of Bannockburn and of the signing of Magna Charta, as also the capitals of the counties of England and the rivers upon which they stood. She knew that $(a + b)^2$ equalled $a^2 + 2ab + b^2$, and was able to do some quite amusing things with a compass, a ruler and a sheet of squared paper without any aid from the books of Euclid. She was taught to play the piano by a music mistress, who in her turn had been taught by a man who had once been a musician before he became a father of a family of six small children: and she was taught wood-carving by a very incompetent, ignorant and elderly gentleman, who knew rather less about the business than the village carpenter. She also learnt to dance: and she learnt to dance well: not because she was well taught, but simply because she liked dancing. It cannot be said that she ever read deeply; but during those years she gained a thorough knowledge of the works of Miss L. T. Meade, Mrs. Henry Wood and Miss Marie Corelli.

"Before leaving 'Orwell House' she was duly confirmed and became a communicant of the Anglican Church.

"She then returned to Surbiton and presently 'came out' at a ball given by Sir Percy Baxter, who was Con-

servative Member of Parliament for the constituency at that time. She danced seven dances with a young gentleman from Woolwich, whose name she treasured in her memory for several months, but whom she never saw again.

"For five years she lived at Surbiton, helping her mother in her household tasks: going regularly to local subscription dances: occasionally to a theatre in Town; and annually to the seaside. She was by no means pretty—this is the story of the Unbeautiful Princess—and her personality was not attractive. She had a mild flirtation with the curate that lasted a year; until, indeed, that priest went to another parish and married the elderly daughter of a retired builder who had £500 a year of her own. Beyond this, she had no love affair that could be recorded as such.

"When she was twenty-five her father died, rather suddenly, from pneumonia: and the house at Surbiton had to be given up. Her mother had an annuity of £300 a year and another £300 from invested stock. They went and lived in a small house in the suburbs of Bournemouth.

"The three princes were now out in the world, earning, or trying to earn, a livelihood. The eldest had already married and settled down as a doctor in Bromley: he had not a lucrative practice, but he managed to live. The second prince, who was the same age as the princess, had been on the Stock Exchange, but had latterly abandoned this in favour of selling motor-cars on commission; an exercise in which he sometimes made money and sometimes did not: he was unmarried. The third and youngest of the three princes went to Oxford during a year of his father's prosperity, but, having run heavily into debt, left for Australia before taking his degree. He was said (by his family) to be sheep-farming in that colony: an euphenism for the employment as bar-tender in a flash saloon in Sydney. He returned to England during the war and was blown to pieces by a 5.9 in the neighbourhood of Pozières. Since then he has always been spoken of by

his relatives (with a pride that was denied him in his lifetime) as 'poor Harry.'

"When the princess was thirty years of age, her mother died and with her died also the annuity of £300 a year. After everything was settled up only £270 a year accrued from the estate of the deceased. £100 a year of this was divided between the two princes and the princess was left with an income of £170 a year.

"You will readily perceive, Mr. Sumner, that it is impossible for a princess—in this imperfect world—to live upon so miserable a pittance: at least, for so imperfect a princess as Princess Babs: a perfect princess, I suppose, can live on nothing. It was necessary, therefore, for the princess to augment her income or to reduce her expenditure in one way or another. Now the princess, unhappily, had nothing to sell. An imperfect acquaintance with the dates of the accession of kings to the throne and with the English rivers, with pianoforte exercises and poker-work, has no marketable value: and the beauty of the princess, as I have already said, was not of a high enough order to be saleable in the marriage-market—or elsewhere. So the princess, who is now thirty-five years old, keeps house for her uncle."

Miss Trevannon paused and for some little time stared dreamily at the sunlit landscape that lay stretched out at her feet. Matthew Sumner was just about to say something—anything: for he was finding it most difficult to speak in a way proper to the occasion—when Miss Trevannon continued:—

"You must bear in mind, Mr. Sumner, that the princess has no aptitude for anything that could make her lot easier. She cannot read: she can neither play, write nor paint: she has no means by which she can entertain her mind. Yet she desires—as every princess must desire—many things. She desires beautiful clothes and to see new places: she desires attention: she yearns for all the material benefits (I fear she is a very commonplace princess) that wealth can give. But she will enjoy none of

these things: until she dies she will be a guest—on sufferance and in return for some sort of service rendered—in other people's houses."

"Miss Trevannon," broke in Matthew Sumner, "it would seem impertinent of me to offer you my most deep sympathy: but I am powerless to do more than this: and I can, perhaps, hardly do less."

"Good God!" cried Miss Trevannon—and Matthew Sumner almost jumped at the words, so unexpected were they—"you don't think I'm talking about myself, do you?"

"I . . . I . . . thought . . . " stammered Sumner.

"Heavens, man: are you a fool? Is it probable—is it even possible—that the woman whose life I have just pictured to you could tell the tale herself? Don't you see the tragedy of the whole business is that that sort of woman is inarticulate? Why, if she could herself have told you her own story as I've told it to you, she would be saved. She would have at once done something: have been something: even if she had the art to tell it, she wouldn't have the character to get up on her hind legs and talk! These miserable women like my cousin (it's my cousin, who keeps house for the old man, I'm talking about)—they're the relic of a past age: they are neither Victorian nor Georgian: they have all the bad upbringing of the Victorian era and all the discontent and extravagant desires of the first decade of the Georgian era: and they're not one: they're a thousand—a million; useless by-products of a transition period."

"Then you don't keep house for the Colonel?"

"I? God, no! I run a hat-shop in South Molton Street. I'm 'Lucille:' if you want to borrow a thousand pounds and can give good security and pay a round 10 per cent., you can have the money to-morrow. I'm here for a few days' rest whilst my cousin is away at her aunt's who is ill."

Mr. Matthew Sumner stared out over the forest with troubled eyes. He was silent for nearly a minute. He

was then about to say something more than ordinarily foolish, when old Mr. Jardine stepped out from the house on to the verandah. He carried an umbrella.

"I wish," he said, petulantly, to Miss Trevannon, "that Babs would learn to roll an umbrella: this is a perfect disgrace: I am ashamed to be seen out with it—even in Ruan Abbas."

CHAPTER XII: THE DIVERTING EXPERIENCES OF THE PRUDENT LOVER

IT was a jolly day. There was no doubt about it. A number of very poor people—Auguste Bacque, for instance, who was stealing box-wood to make charcoal, and Jacques Hans, the goat-herd, and old Mère Aubin and little bare-legged Marie had all said it, so Mr. Matthew Sumner knew that it must be so. For if those who are poor and always hungry and weary and in want can find the heart amidst so many woes to speak well of the day, it must surely be a day of days, and deserving of great praise; and so thought Matthew Sumner, as he swung down the hill road, that was but little more than a track, through the spring sunshine.

Woods stretched away on either side of him for many miles. The oak-trees were already clothed in garments of young leaves of the most tender green that stood out, a-flame in the sunshine, here and there against the dark mass of ilex or of box or the red earth of a hillside scar. The edge of the road was starred with small white flowers and was alive with butterflies: some painted in black and white: some orange and red: and now and again a great one, all in black and yellow, six inches or so from wing-tip to wing-tip, sailed gracefully down upon the still air, to stay but for a moment above the petal of a flower and then to be off again over the tops of trees. There were large dragon-flies, of an hundred different hues, that flew in straight lines up and down the path at the speed of an express train: and now and again a white-tailed rabbit would pop out into the open to stare for the part of a second at the traveller, and to be gone again into his

burrow before Matthew Sumner could say even so brief a phrase as "Jack Robinson."

Sumner had eaten his lunch at the inn called "Au Bûcheron Joyeux," perched on the saddle over which the woodland road ran, to drop, on the further side, into the Val des Buis. The inn—which is but a resort of woodmen and charcoal-burners—is little more than a drinking-booth: a rude wooden shanty with a mud floor, a great hearth with the *marmite* hanging from a chain in the chimney and a plank table to eat off, swung across two trestles. But Matthew Sumner was hungry after his two hours' walk in the forenoon, and he found the cheese and bread and eggs excellent and the rough red wine not unpleasing to the occasion. Now, fed and watered and rested, he was on his way back again from the foothills to the little town of Sarradas in the plain and to the hotel where he was lodged. To be sure, it had been a jolly day: it was still a jolly day, for it was not yet four o'clock in the afternoon, and Matthew Sumner was about to take out of his pocket a pipe or penny whistle, which he often carried and sometimes played when quite alone in the country, when he heard a strange noise coming from a clump of box and holly-trees that flanked the road. It was not only a strange noise: it was a human noise.

Matthew Sumner clambered up the grassy bank at the roadside until he was next to the hedge of box and holly from behind which the noise came. He could hear better here: it was the sound of someone sobbing, in a half-choked, amateurish kind of way, and now and again the voice called monotonously upon the name of God: not with any formulated request: in prayer: in worship: but merely as an expression of pain.

"God . . . God . . . God," reiterated the voice, "God,"—then a series of sobs—and then again, "God . . . God . . . God," and a silence broken but with one crying out upon the name of God, more vicious in intonation than any before, whilst Sumner walked around the rampart

of bushes trying to find a way in and to discover this disturber of the silence and the peace of the hills.

At length Sumner found a break in the bushes, and pushing his way in under the low branches of an aged and deformed holly-tree, stepped out into the sunshine. Before him lay an open space, almost circular in shape and white with a thousand daisies. This space was surrounded on all sides with holly and box, so that it had the appearance of an arena: or as though it had been particularly apportioned and designed by King Oberon, or, perhaps, by Puck, as a stage for fairy revels. Stretched out among the daisies lay the figure of a man. He lay there face downwards among the flowers, and his shoulders still shook now and again. Sumner could not see his face, which was to the earth, but his hat lay a way off and his long, fair hair fell untidily about his head, as though he had rubbed his hand backwards and forwards among it not long since. For the rest, he wore a rough tweed jacket and a pair of grey flannel trousers, and was clearly an Englishman in spite of these un-English signs of grief: and, from what was to be seen of him as he lay there among the daisies, Sumner took him to be under thirty years of age.

For more than a minute Sumner stood there looking down upon the man who still lay with his face earthwards half buried in the white flowers. He began to be oppressed with a sense of unreality in the affair. The place was too like a stage: the ring of dark holly-trees and box bushes too like their pictures upon painted cardboard: the daisies too much like paper daisies: the sunlight like limelight: the man too much like an actor in the middle stage at the going up of the curtain on the second act: and the green dragon-fly that hung motionless a few feet in the air above the prostrate figure, might well have been suspended (as Sumner almost began to believe it was) by an invisible wire from the roof of the theatre.

Matthew Sumner turned to go. He had not been seen

and it was to be thought that the young man who had chosen so secret a place in which to give way to his grief would be but ill-pleased at being discovered. Sumner stepped carefully across the soft carpet of grass and flowers back towards the bushes through which he had come: but with little fear of being heard, for even his noisy scrambling through the bushes when he had pushed his way in had failed to arouse the man among the daisies. But all human endeavour is, alas, subject to accidents and occasions beyond any mortal control, and before Matthew Sumner had stepped two paces away he was stricken with an uncontrollable impulse to sneeze: before he had gone three paces he sneezed: not a poor whistling down the nostrils or a snuffle or a cough, but a full-grown sneeze: irruptive, explosive, sonorous: a sound so sudden in its beginning and of such volume that a rabbit which had been sitting up in the open for some time watching the unmoving figure in the grass, leapt back into its hole and suffered from severe nervous shock for several hours afterwards, and the man rolled over and up into a sitting position and glared with wide-open eyes at Matthew Sumner.

"Who in hell are you?" he said, before Sumner had time to explain his presence or to apologize or to say anything whatsoever. "What the hell are you doing here?" he repeated, peremptorily.

Sumner stood gazing stupidly down upon the man beneath him: put out of countenance by this angry questioning and by the two large, wide-open blue eyes that stared without winking into his. The man's yellow hair lay in wisps over his forehead: his white flannel shirt lay open at the throat, and he wore no kerchief or cravat: his fair moustache was untrimmed and had been allowed to grow too far down around the corners of his mouth. It was a handsome face: the breadth of forehead showed a high index of mentality: there was vision in the eye and humour in the nose. The mouth and chin were weak: the general aspect of the mask indescribably leonine: but a

very human, agreeable and sentimental lion, thought Sumner; and as he began to apologize he seemed to remember having seen the man somewhere before.

"I am really very sorry. I had no wish . . . I did not mean to . . . to intrude: but I heard a noise. I was in the road. I pushed my way in here to see what was the matter. You were lying on your face and did not see . . . I was going away, but . . . er . . . I sneezed . . ."

"I heard you," said the other, gravely. A smile hung for an instant on his lips and his too mobile nose quivered slightly. "I heard you: it was the devil of a sneeze."

"Yes," said Sumner, "I'm sorry."

"I've seen you before," the man said, suddenly; "you're staying at the hotel in Sarradas, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Sumner. He remembered, now, where he had seen the leonine young man: once or twice in the hotel and about the town with a tall dark girl, who had been staying at the Hôtel Splendide for some weeks.

"I thought I might be of some help," he said, stupidly, and was sorry immediately afterwards for making so tactless a remark. But the other did not take it amiss.

"These women are the devil," he said.

He jumped up and shook himself.

"And me," he added, as though wishful to be just in the matter. There was a frankness about the man that was disarming: an openness that was peculiarly attractive: Sumner already felt that he had known him for as many imaginary years as he had actual minutes.

Matthew Sumner laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"She may alter her mind," he said.

"She might," added the other, but without any show of hope in such a happening.

"Also—there are other women in the world," continued Sumner, happy that his attempts at consolation in so delicate a matter were not being repulsed.

"True—that's very true," replied the young man, gloomily.

"I have no wish to offend . . . I only wish to help: to console, if I may, a little."

"I am not offended: it were foolish to be so: I, who need consolation."

"Then I was about to add that . . . that perhaps, in after years, you will be unable to understand—you will laugh—at this . . . er . . . infatuation (I do not use the word in an ill sense) which is so painful to you now."

"Perhaps: I may: quite likely," said the fair young man, very miserably. He stood, despondently, with his head sunk forward, his shoulders hunched up and his hands thrust into the pockets of his jacket.

It was hardly the reply that Matthew Sumner expected to receive. He did not understand this ready agreement in what must have bordered upon blasphemy to the mind of the lover. Sumner was a little put out by this, for he had already prepared in his mind arguments to meet denial and indignation. So he reverted, lamely, to the penultimate suggestion.

"Even if she has said 'no' . . ."

"Good God!" broke in the young man, "she didn't say 'no'; she said 'yes!'"

"What?" shouted Sumner.

"She said 'yes.'"

Matthew Sumner stared at the other in blank astonishment.

"She said 'yes,'" he repeated, "that's the whole trouble."

"That's the whole trouble?" echoed Sumner, mechanically.

"And now I'm not sure that she loves me."

"Not sure that she loves you?"

"And I'm not sure that I love her," he continued, in a more miserable voice than he had used heretofore. He stood for some moments in silence, staring with unseeing eyes at the daisies around his feet.

"It's a bloody business," he said at last. "Are you walking back to Sarradas?"

"Yes."

"We can walk back together—unless you want to be alone: I can tell you about it on the way."

"I should be delighted," said Matthew Sumner. "Perhaps I may yet be of some little help to you."

"I am afraid I am past all help," said the young man, bitterly, as he pushed his way out in front of Sumner through the box bushes.

"My father," began the fair young man, "was a Lowland Scot: he died when I was yet a child. My mother, who died but a few years ago, came of Normandy stock. It is thus not perhaps unnatural that I should inherit a cautious nature, and a predisposition to find motives of expediency behind the actions of the men and women with whom I come in contact. Indeed, not only did I inherit so prudent a temper, but also by the example and precepts of my parents I was taught, if not to suspect the motives of others, at least to examine circumspectly the actions of those others in respect to myself. But I did not only inherit prudence from my parents: I inherited a considerable capital invested in gilt-edged securities, real estate, and a house which I have but recently sold for five times what my father gave for it. I also inherited—perhaps by some throw-back to an earlier ancestor, for I could hardly have acquired it—a love for the love of women. Please do not misunderstand me. I am no whoremonger. The buying of a woman's body, like so much cheese over a counter, revolts me: moreover, the fear of venereal disease is a sufficient deterrent to these indulgences for any one of so prudent a character as myself. Nevertheless, I am for ever attracted to woman: she is the other half which makes the complete whole. I am as irresistibly attracted towards her as is the moth to the candleflame. Without woman life would be for me a desert and a despair: if I am not falling in love, I am falling out of love. Yet I am now thirty-two—and unmarried.

"To be rich is, no doubt, agreeable:—

'They may talk as they please about what they call pelf,
And how one ought never to think of one's self,
And how pleasures of thought surpass eating and drinking—
My pleasure of thought is the pleasure of thinking
How pleasant it is to have money, heigh ho!
How pleasant it is to have money.'

"But it *is* truly pleasant to have money: there are, however, certain drawbacks: there is always some fly in the ointment: some skull upon the dinner-table: some sword hanging by a hair above the head of Dives."

For some dozen paces the young man walked on in silence along the sandy road. Then, with an engaging candour, at variance with the account of his own character that he had already given, he turned to Matthew Sumner and said:—

"My name is Callender: am I impertinent in asking yours? It is easier, always, to talk to a man when you know his name."

"No, no. Not at all," said Sumner, with the ambiguous earnestness of kindly and nervous people, "my name is Sumner: S-U-M-N-E-R: Matthew Sumner."

"Mr. Sumner," continued the young man, "I endure one of the worst fates in the world: I am a supremely eligible young man." Mr. Callender said this with such emphasis, and withal in so dismal a voice that Sumner had some difficulty to stop himself from laughing.

"I am good-looking," continued Callender—"it were childish to be modest about it—I am still young: I have no vices, and most of the domestic virtues; and above all, I am a man—I use the allotted phrase—of considerable independent means.

"I will pass over the *amours* of my boyhood. They were not particularly creditable (on either side); and they are in no sense germane to my present unhappiness. Soon after I left the University of Oxford, whilst I was staying at St. Ives with my mother for the summer, I met Claire Holstan.

"I cannot adequately describe to you either the beauty

and many virtues of Claire or the effect that they had upon me: to attempt so to do would be to court failure and to weary you unduly. It is enough to state simply that she was tall and dark: a fine horsewoman: of a candid nature, and that she loved me very sincerely.

"I will not weary you by recounting the gradations of a summer love affair: they were, I suppose, commonplace enough and conformed to type. At the end of a month I was almost as much in love with Claire as Claire was with me. There seemed no reason why we should not become engaged to be married. We were both young: but early marriages are not always the most unhappy. I think my mother would not have raised more than a formal objection in the matter: an objection that would be overcome—that would be expected to be overcome—by a little persuasion on the part of the contracting parties. Claire's mother—who watched the affair with solicitude and approval over the top of her crochet-work—was patently on the side of the angels. . . .

"I decided to ask Claire to marry me. She would not have accepted less: self-respect, one of the first fetiches to be discarded with the advance of years, would, perhaps, not have allowed me to offer less than this. I asked her to meet me, and there was no mistaking the purpose of the occasion. In the hotel grounds and directly under the right wing of the building, there was a sunken garden: a small square lawn in the centre of which stood a sundial and around which, on the edge of a grass bank, ran a narrow gravel path. The garden was surrounded with a yew hedge. It would have been difficult for two lovers to have found a more suitable meeting-place.

"I asked her one morning to meet me there after dinner, at half-past nine. I spent the remainder of the day, Mr. Sumner, in a fever of unrest. I reviewed a thousand reasons why it was to Claire's very material advantage to mary me: and as many why it was mine now to marry Claire. The impression of Claire's mother in my mind effaced the impression of Claire. I could not

forget the gleam of satisfaction in the eyes of that fat and competent woman as she watched over her eternal crochet-work her daughter in the company of that so estimable and eligible young man. To what extent was Claire the conscious abettor of these designs? I tortured myself with this question.

"I think that that day was one of the longest that I have ever known: the minute-hand of the clock dragged itself slowly and painfully around the huge circumference of an hour. A year passed and it was lunch-time: two years rolled by and I went in to the lounge to tea—only to find Mrs. Holstan welcoming me with a comfortable and proprietary smile: as she sipped her china tea and nibbled at a savoury sandwich, she seemed to me to be smacking her lips over something more than these material morsels: over the supporter of her daughter and her presumptive grandchildren on so many thousand pounds a year.

"Claire was not there: she was playing in the local handicap: and would, I knew, be all day on the links. I got away from Mrs. Holstan, somehow, without being rude; and if she saw anything at all odd in my manner, I do not doubt but that she made a highly satisfactory diagnosis of my state of mind.

"I do not know how many years, centuries or æons elapsed between tea and dinner—there is some sort of geometrical progression in these things—and, by the time I had changed and was sitting at the table with my mother in the dining-room, my state of mind was such that I was quite unable to surmise my actions a minute in advance.

"Once, and once again only, during dinner did I look towards the Holstans' table. Claire, with her beautiful head half turned in my direction, met my glance. She understood—not, thank God, the thoughts and fears at that moment rioting in my mind—but that in two hours' time she would be asked to give all that she had to give, and, in that giving, would know something of the peace of God, the which—we are credibly informed—passes all

understanding. Her face was paler than usual: happiness trembled upon her lips; and there was a light in her eyes as they met mine, that made me look down hurriedly on my plate and busy myself with the better dissection of the leg of a fowl. When I looked up again she had turned and was talking to her mother: I have no doubt now that the matter was an innocent and a trivial one: of her place in the handicap: of to-morrow's weather: of the incapacity of the waiter: that the potatoes were badly cooked. But to me, at that moment, it was certain that she was telling her mother that which her mother had long expected and had so eagerly desired.

"I do not know how I sat through that meal without advertising my state of mind. The dinner seemed endless. At last it was over; and I followed my mother into the drawing-room. I talked mechanically to one or two people and drank two cups of black coffee. Some one asked me to play. I sat at the piano for a few moments, searching over the keys for a motif: and then, hardly realizing that I was doing so, I crashed out into the mock love scene in Figaro. I have often played better since; but never, I think, have I made speak the spirit of the composer more faithfully. I was applauded by a number of comfortable fools who liked noise and a tune and who were unable to understand what I had made the piano speak: had the chords and discords been interpreted to them in the spoken word, I would have been turned out of the house. Claire's mother purred her appreciation in a corner. Claire was not in the room. I glanced at the gilt clock on the mantelpiece: it was a quarter past nine. I jumped up from the music-stool, and, shaking off those who would ask me to play again, I slipped out of the room.

"Alcohol," continued Mr. Callender, after a pause, "is said to encourage the amorous. Perhaps I paid too great an importance to a generality: or maybe the dose was insufficient, or too large . . .

"I went into the smoking-room and rang the bell. I

ordered a large whiskey and soda. I sat drinking it and watching the minute hand of the clock creep down from a horizontal to a vertical position. I had emptied the glass before the hand had completed half the quadrant. It seemed to me that I had but been drinking soda-water. I rang again and repeated my order to the slightly scandalised waiter. I drained the glass at a draught. There was virtue in the liquor after all. My brain became clear and my purpose firm. At last, and in a moment, I knew what I was about. I was tortured with no uncertainties. I walked out of the room, and upstairs without any hesitation. I went into my bedroom and locked the door. Alcohol, Mr. Sumner, cannot transmute: it can only fortify: it cannot change a characteristic: it can only increase it. Alcohol can only make the foolish more foolish: the clever cleverer: the amorous more amorous; and the prudent more prudent. The whiskey but reinforced, to the subjection of all else, the dominating complex in my nature. The clock struck the half-hour as I went into my bedroom and locked the door . . .

"I do not know for how long Claire walked in the sunken garden waiting for me to come. I slept that night the sleep of the drugged: I have wondered since if Claire slept that night at all. I awoke next morning suffering from a headache and the agony of remorse. I spoke a few words about nothing to Claire, in the presence of her mother, during the morning. To have tried to have seen her alone would have been useless. She and her mother left the hotel a few days later: I have never seen her since."

The leonine young man sighed heavily.

"My next love affair," he continued, "was more painful, if less dramatic. In the first place I was older; and my capacity for feeling pain had increased. Moreover, the image of Claire in my mind became soon effaced: the remorse—or rather the regret—that I felt in the business, soon became but a memory to sigh over did I feel in a sentimental mood.

"In a country town, the name of which does not matter to you, there lives—or rather lived—for he has been dead these many years—a lawyer. He was a lawyer of the old school: a country lawyer of the old school: with wonderful manners, a large family and a practice that was already moribund. He lived in a fine old brick house with a door painted white in a sleepy side-street. Behind the house was an old-world garden, surrounded with high walls and full of gnarled apple-trees, and in it was a square lawn and in the centre of the lawn there was a large mulberry-tree. Had you been in that garden and had you stood on that lawn so many years ago, you would have seen the mulberry-tree peopled with an Elf and with a Goblin. I love her too much even now to speak her name, so you must let me call her the Elf. I was the Goblin. She was then ten years old: I was fourteen: and we sat together—very close together—in a fork made by the branches of the mulberry-tree, and ate mulberries. Mulberries are messy things, and the white frock which the Elf wore was badly stained, and the rough bark of the tree had torn a hole in the knee of her stocking; and she was scolded by her mother about this and other matters when she and the Goblin came in to tea. Of the other members of the family, the Goblin noticed but little at that time. There was a brother, two years older than the Elf, whom the Goblin sometimes fought. There were three elder sisters, two of whom were at home: but these had their hair up (or almost up) and were regarded and ignored as Olympians. There was an elder brother who was away; and there was an uncle: an infirm old gentleman with an impediment in his speech, who pottered about in a shanty at the bottom of the garden (he called it his workshop) and who was rarely to be seen save at meal-times, and not even then if there were guests from outside. The Goblin was not altogether from outside, for he was a second cousin of the Elf and moreover he was but a child.

"For two long summer months the Elf and I played together in the old-world garden and over the moorlands

which lay around the sleepy old country town. But at last the Goblin had to go away and leave the Elf alone in the garden. He went away, sad at heart, with the picture of two serious grey eyes and a wave of corn-yellow hair in his mind: in his pocket a wisp of silken hair tied up with a piece of green ribbon from off a box of chocolates and a broken-bladed pocket-knife that had once been hers: and in his heart the memory of pouted lips wet with kisses and red with the juice of mulberries.

"It was ten years later when I saw the Elf again. The father and the uncle were dead. Her brother and two of her sisters were about the world trying, some way or another, to live, and she and her mother and one sister lived in a wooden bungalow by the sea.

"Again, for two months, the Elf and the Goblin played together, but this time upon the seashore. Is there a great difference between ten and twenty? Between fourteen and twenty-four? And is there a great difference between climbing trees and climbing cliffs?

"But after all, there must be a difference, for there was one. If not between ten and twenty: yet between fourteen and twenty-four. It was not because of any memory of Claire: that had been now dead a year. It was because the Goblin was no longer a Goblin, but a man.

"I should like to try and paint you a picture of the Elf as she was then. A tall and very slender figure, with a rope of yellow hair coiled around her small head in one great plait. Her body was clothed in a short dark tweed skirt and a white jumper: she was bare-headed always and her skin was burnt by exposure to the sun and the wind to the semblance of biscuit porcelain held in the sunlight. Her wide grey eyes were fearless and looked you very straight in the face: and she spoke very softly and sweetly and with a childlike directness and disregard for circumlocution.

"She was a fearless climber and knew all the difficult ways down the cliffs, and all the secret caves and hidden beaches on that part of the coast. She was the honoured

guest at the hearth of every farmhouse in the neighbourhood, and there was not a horse which she had not been astride or a dog that she did not know by name for many a mile round.

"For two months she and the Goblin, who had grown up, roamed together over the wide moors or along the long beaches or scaled the steep cliffs or sought out the caves, which once had been known to smugglers and which were now known to none but to her and to him. They talked together of an hundred different things and each morning as he went to meet her—at her house or wood or on the cliff called Ors-Han or on the little quay of Pengrayne or at the stile behind Melyor's Farm—he had it in mind to talk of the one thing that these two had not spoken of since they had played together ten years before: and each evening he went back to his own place with no word spoken—or no word spoken, as it seemed to her as she went gravely to bed, worth while remembering.

"It was not that she had not tried to make him speak: with such little art as a child may use. But he always went away and left her still looking wistfully after him and feeling very lonely at heart.

"It would have been so pleasant for him to have spoken: have I not said that the Elf was very lovely? Dear God! and now it is too late; and at night, even now, after many years, I lie awake tortured with longing and desire and eaten up with regret . . .

"It is odd to look back upon the arguments that then prevailed with me. That I thought, as, God forgive me, I did think, that she tried to make me love her not only to be loved but to a more material end, had, however, less influence with me than other reasons. I had by that time begun to form ambitions which are now dead. Music filled my mind, and made me drunk, and I imagined many foolish things. What help would this Elf be to me in these things? She could talk but as a child talks . . . and I was still too much of a child to know that no man has ever learnt to talk more wisely than a child. A

little knowledge—a very little knowledge—had made me mad.

"There was one other thing that loomed in my mind out of all proportion to its worth: the picture of that infirm old man, babbling incoherently at the dinner-table: the Elf's uncle, who had been dead so many years.

"He must have made a deep impression on my boyish mind, although he was but a neglected part of the household, ready to be put out of sight on any occasion or excuse. This in itself, perhaps, covered him with a romantic glamour like a room which one is forbidden to enter or a door that is always locked. His odd appearance: his delight in a variety of absurdities: his occasional outbursts of senile rage; and his clipped speech, which only those long used to it could understand; all this a child would remember: and it did not need Jack's statement to me, 'Uncle George, you know, is balmy on the crumpet,' for me not to forget easily that aged and pathetic figure. So, in my mind, ten years later, this memory still remained, when many others had grown dim or had altogether vanished; and I came to ask myself, was it sane, was it wise, was it prudent to marry a girl whose uncle was mad?

"There is a lot of tosh talked about eugenics: I knew just enough about this very speculative science to assimilate the tosh—and little more. I dreamed of a tainted strain and an imbecile progeny. The diseased soul that could suspect a child might have been healed in time by a child's tears: mean ambitions are commonly short-lived and are not, as a rule, deep-rooted in the mind: but the ingenious speculation of an hereditary madness found in a character such as mine a soil in which to grow and flourish until it overshadowed all other suggestions. So that, when the day came for me to leave the sea-shore, I said farewell to the Elf without any other demonstration than the shaking of her slender hand. It was only some years later, when she was comfortably married to an

actuary, that I learnt that Uncle George was an uncle by marriage."

The telling of this part of his history clearly moved the young man deeply. He blew his nose two or three times violently as a specific against tears; and, after walking for some minutes in silence, continued his narrative in a rather uncertain voice:—

"Six months later I met the Elf once again: she was staying in Town, and I had tea with her. I went into the room with my mind made up (as I thought) to ask her to marry me. I came out of it two hours later in a frame of mind which even now fills me with horror to remember. Once again I had said nothing, and the look in her eyes when I left haunted me for many days afterwards. I got down the steps of the house and somehow into a tube station. I changed at Charing Cross. As I stood there on the crowded platform, feeling more miserable and alone than I had ever felt before, I decided I would go back to the Elf. I crossed to the other platform. I would go back and speak.

"You may remember that Firth is reported to have said that at one time he was uncertain as to whether he would be a painter or an auctioneer, and Whistler's comment was that he probably tossed up. Anyhow, I did.

"If any curious person had walked to the far and deserted end of that platform he might have seen a young man, very presentably dressed, tossing a half-crown up in the air: 'Heads I go back to her,' I said, 'tails I don't.' It came down heads. I stared blankly at the coin. The decision seemed so suddenly made. 'Best out of three,' I said. Twice more the coin came down head uppermost."

The young man paused for a moment.

"I put the coin back into my pocket," he continued; "there were a number of coins there. I shook them up altogether, saying: "If the majority come out heads up, I go: this is final.' I took out the handful of coins. I

looked at them. Seven coins lay in my open palm: five of them were heads."

For nearly a hundred yards Mr. Callender walked in silence, till at last Mr. Sumner said:—

"So you went back?"

"No, sir," replied the young man, "I did not: I stepped on to the escalator that carries one to the District Railway."

"Perhaps," murmured Mr. Matthew Sumner, "it was the best thing you could have done."

The young man shook his head. He said nothing for a little while and then began speaking again a little less miserably than before.

"What, Mr. Sumner," he asked, "do you think the most final thing in the world?"

"Getting married," said Sumner, with a faint grin: for all his kindliness he could not help it.

"True: that's very true," murmured the other, "but I meant of actions which are of daily occurrence."

"And which do you think the most final?"

"The posting of a letter. There is something in the mere act of slipping an envelope into the gaping mouth of those red monsters we call pillar-boxes that appals me. It is one of those actions which may have results so far-reaching that we cannot even conceive their extent: and an action which, when once done, can in no way be limited or repeated. It is so definite an act, Mr. Sumner, that I, who have a natural repugnance to and distrust of all definite action, can hardly even post a crossed cheque paying for a bottle of hair tonic without a trembling of the hand and a catch in the breath, as I drop the envelope into the pillar-box. The interior of these contrivances is as death is—an undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns.

"About a year before the outbreak of the late war, Mr. Sumner, I very nearly became engaged to be married. Would that I had been! I suffered the usual preliminary tortures which I need not detail to you: you will gather

from my experiences of which I have already told you, something of their nature. At length, one Sunday evening, I made up my mind to take the final step. I sat down at my desk in my library and wrote to Monica offering her my devotion and the endowment of all my worldly goods. I am a good letter-writer; and I do not think I was less skilful than usual in this epistle. I had adequate reason to believe that its receipt would not be unexpected and that its appeal would not be ignored. I went out of the house and dropped that letter into the pillar-box that stood at the bottom of the lane with something of the same courage and exultation in my heart as must have been in the heart of Quintus Curtius when he leapt into the gulf.

"I went back to the house and to bed: but not to sleep. Again, I will not attempt to recount to you the doubts and questionings that held revel in my brain as I lay sleepless, tossing to and fro, upon the bed: —

> 'The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
> Moves on . . .'

and I regretted with a bitterness and a despair that became every minute more hard to bear, an action the effects of which had by now passed out of my control. But had they passed altogether out of my control? The last post had gone that evening before I had begun to write: the letter-box would not be cleared till the morning. Was my act really final? Could I even now nullify the result of an action which I had already begun to deplore?

"About that time, Mr. Sumner, the papers were full of the accounts of outrages committed by the suffragettes upon the contents of pillar-boxes. The common practise was to pour acid into the box and thus destroy the paper within. The memory held me fascinated as I lay, miserably awake, in the middle night.

"Had you, Mr. Sumner, in the small hours of that particular Monday morning, stood at the top of Fallow Lane, you would have seen a sign and a portent—a

portent more astonishing than the burning bush: the Sign of the Burning Pillar-Box. A scarlet pillar-box has always seemed to me very like a scarlet dragon: and then and there you would have seen a scarlet dragon spouting fire from its mouth: a very horrific monster: with much combustible, a love-letter and a pint of paraffin burning in its vitals.

"I went back to bed and fell asleep; and on the morrow yet another vandalism was laid at the door of those women who most ardently wanted votes."

"Good God!" ejaculated Matthew Sumner, staring at his companion.

"Yes: it was an atrocious act. I bitterly regretted it afterwards."

"But what about all the other letters?"

"Yes: well, I suppose the Post Office bears the brunt in these matters. But I wish, now, that I'd married Monica. We were made for one another."

The young man sighed heavily.

"I never saw her again," he added. "Afterwards, I believe, she was seduced by an official in the Circumlocution Office and was packed off to South America. She was a very beautiful girl. I cannot but feel that I may have been to some extent responsible in the matter.

"It was in the spring of 1914," continued the leonine young man, hurriedly, as if anxious to forestall any comment that Matthew Sumner might make upon the episode of the pillar-box, "that I met Mrs. Garforth. She was a most attractive woman and she played the fiddle as few men can play it. Her pale, oval face looked out from a mass of brown hair, that was shot with a metallic lustre, with a startling insistence: and her wide blue eyes were tender and childlike and yet lit with the vision of intimate and compelling things. Her husband was one of the stupidest people that I have ever met: he played polo: I don't think he ever did anything else; though I believe he had once been in a cavalry regiment. He thought polo: he dreamt polo: he lived for polo. Indeed Tou-tou

and I spoke of him between ourselves, as *Le Polo.*

"Tou-tou, of course, was only her nickname: she had been impossibly christened; Geraldine or some equally improbable name.

"It was a fortunate thing for Tou-tou and myself that her husband hated the very sight of a boat. I had my yawl, the *Argo,* lying in the Hamble, and we spent many happy days together in the Solent and the adjacent waters. By the best of good luck, Garforth had just bought a couple of new polo-ponies and was so taken up with training these animals, that his wife was left very much to herself. The last picture that I have in my mind of Tou-tou is that of a slender figure, clad in a short skirt of white serge and a white knitted jumper, sitting on the bowsprit, framed against the gold and crimson of the sunset sky. She was bare-headed, and her glorious hair was turned to copper in the red light of the sun. Her bare feet just touched the wire stay of the bowsprit, so as to maintain her balance. She swayed a little to and fro as the boat rose and fell with the swell; and she laughed happily at me when I cried out in fear lest she would fall into the sea. . . .

"On the way back my steering was erratic, and earned the comprehensive curses of the owners of a miscellany of craft: it is not easy to steer with a woman lying in your arms, who demands constant attention. It was then that we arranged to meet later in Paris . . . we were both very happy.

"Two months later I went to Paris—to the Hôtel Clarice: where I engaged rooms and told the manager I was waiting for my wife, who was due to arrive in two or three days' time. Those days, Mr. Sumner, were purgatory: a hundred times I turned over in my mind what little I knew of the relations between Tou-tou and her husband: I began to regret more deeply every hour that I had made myself a party to this deception: I was tormented . . ."

"Such feelings, Mr. Callender," broke in Matthew Sum-

ner, "at least do you credit. That many people are unhappily and unsuitably married I suppose cannot be helped: it were uncharitable to condemn all who seek to console: nevertheless, the hesitation that you felt—the remorse for the pain that you must necessarily cause the husband—however unsympathetic he may have been—I say such feelings are very creditable."

"Good God!" exclaimed the young man, "you don't suppose I cared a curse about the husband, do you? I was thinking about myself."

"I don't understand," wailed Matthew Sumner.

"*'Was there collusion?*' That was the question I asked myself over and over again for three mortal days. Perhaps, Mr. Sumner, you are not conversant with the English Divorce Laws? Are you aware that damages—heavy damages—can be awarded to the injured husband against a co-respondent?—that the amount claimed and awarded is usually in proportion to the victim's capacity to pay? And I am a wealthy man, Mr. Sumner. It is almost impossible to prove collusion in such a case: besides, what jury of sentimental tradesmen would for one moment regard such a thing as collusion possible, or see in the plaintiff but the foully wronged husband and in the respondent, but the erring wife? Yet such things happen every day. Garforth was reputed a rich man: but what did I know of his riches save that he spent money freely. The more likelihood, surely, of his being in debt. And Tou-tou—if she spent a hundred a year in dress, she spent a thousand. What better or easier way of meeting outstanding calls—of keeping out of the hands of the Jews—than heavy damages against a rich and callous young profligate: for so I should appear in court?

"I walked to and fro in the gardens of the Tuilleries through the bright June sunshine, heedless of the children that played around me: regardless of the gay flower-beds and the green trees: blind to one of the most beautiful prospects in the world; and the more I thought about it the more certain became the suspicions bourgeoning in my

mind. I could imagine every detail of the scene: the angry husband arriving late at night and demanding to be shown to the room. The bedroom scene: Tou-tou but half covered in flimsy gauze and her loosened hair, sobbing brokenly: a weeping Magdalene, overwhelmed with shame. Myself, looking unutterably foolish in a pair of pink silk pyjamas: Garforth the central figure, dominating all things: in turn wrathful, bitter, broken: moved to pity by the grief of Tou-tou: cryings upon the name of God: curses upon me: heroic tenderness for Tou-tou. Beside him, the old friend who had come over with him and would see him through the whole ghastly business: who would keep the distraught husband from murder and suicide, and who would prove, as well, a most valuable and competent witness to the finding of the guilty pair, caught *in flagrante delicto*. And behind, the waiter who had shown Garforth up . . . another independent witness.

"Mr. Sumner, I do not know what poor Tou-tou did when she arrived at the Clarice and asked for me: for at that moment I was half-way to Monte Carlo in a first-class compartment of the P.L.M.: and I had not left even a note behind me. There was nothing that I could have said . . . and, moreover, a letter makes the most indisputable evidence."

"I think you were well out of that affair," said Matthew Sumner, a little sternly, "whether your suspicions were correct or not: but I can hardly congratulate you on the manner in which you got out of it."

"It was despicable, I know," said Mr. Callender, in tones of the greatest self-abasement, "deplorable. And I was wrong: oh, so wrong! Tou-tou divorced Garforth only a year afterwards: he deserted her, and a decree nisi was made absolute. If only I had known! I never saw Tou-tou again: I was still in France in August and was drawn into the vortex of war. I have been racked with regret ever since: there was no penal condition: absolutely none. And I ran away. Even now I cannot think of her with an equal mid—'so beautiful she was.'"

The two walkers had by now left the hills and the woods behind them. Before them, lay the little red-tiled town of Sarradas, a chiaroscuro of red and white in the bright sunlight.

"So you were in the war?" said Sumner, at last, as they entered the outskirts of the town; he was at a loss to find anything adequate to say to this so prudent a lover.

"Yes," replied Mr. Callender, "both in France and Salonica. In fact, I believe I hold an unique position in the British Army."

"How?" asked Mr. Sumner.

"The number of people," said the lion-like young man, slowly, "who overstayed their leave must, I imagine, be very great. But I think I may say that I am the only man in the Army who ever *understayed* his leave."

"Understayed his leave?" echoed Matthew Sumner.

"Yes. Who voluntarily returned to his unit in France before his leave had expired. Had I not done so I might, by now, be happily married."

"But you will yet be happily married," said Sumner gently.

"Happily?" asked Mr. Callender, as they came in sight of the hotel.

During the next few days Mr. Matthew Sumner saw the young man, whom he had found weeping alone among the boxwoods, three or four times. But he had no further speech with him, for he was always in the company of the tall dark girl and once with the tall dark girl and her mama. But at the end of the week the girl and her mother left the hotel.

On the afternoon of that day, Mr. Matthew Sumner was walking along the banks of the small stream that trickled down from the hills, and flowed, in larger volume, around the town of Sarradas, presently to flow into the Rhône as a grown-up river.

It was a pleasant meadow through which Matthew Sumner walked: a meadow starred with many flowers.

Here and there along the bank of the stream grew bushes, and occasionally an ilex-tree gave a grateful shade to anyone wishing to sit sheltered from the heat of the sun and watch the limpid water.

In the shade of one of these trees, Matthew Sumner came upon Mr. Callender.

He sat altogether in a heap, a dejected and dispirited object. He looked miserably up at Matthew Sumner as he stood over him.

"I am sure you will be happy together," said Sumner, laying a consoling hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I have seen the girl and I like the look of her."

"So do I," said the other, despondently.

"I am certain it will be a happy marriage," continued Matthew Sumner.

"It won't be."

"But . . ."

"I say it won't be: she's gone: she broke off the engagement yesterday."

"I am sorry—very sorry," said Sumner. He paused for a moment and then continued, "but why, then, so miserable? You thought that you could not be happy with her—was not that so? And you were too honourable to try and withdraw, after you had spoken—if I understand aright? While you were still in that quandary, I would do all I could to comfort you—to give you a reasonable hope. But she, herself, has cut the Gordian knot. Why, then, young sir, so utterly miserable?"

"I loved her," groaned the young man, "I loved her. She—she was designed for me. I was so happy: I had no doubts, no uncertainties. I loved—and I thought I was loved. I hoped . . ."

For the first and last time (at least in this history) Mr. Matthew Sumner altogether lost his temper.

"Sir," he broke in, "you are not only a public danger: you are something much more unpleasant: you are a private nuisance," and he walked off in considerable dudgeon before the leonine young man could think of any reply.

CHAPTER XIII: THE HILARIOUS CONDUCT OF A MAN OF TASTE

ON the ninth day of October, Mr. Matthew Sumner gave a dinner-party: a small dinner-party of six, including himself, at the Carfax club, at half-past seven o'clock.

Mr. Matthew Sumner, though he had numerous acquaintances, had but few friends. He was not gifted with what may be called the social sense; that sense which enables a man to make himself agreeable to any one whom he may chance to meet, at once and without any betrayal of effort. Such men as knew Sumner well enough to accept his invitation to dinner and thus to forego other entertainments, had known him for a period to be counted in years: or else they had so much in common that Sumner's diffidence lay still-born upon the threshold of conversation, and he spoke well and easily of what he knew well and to which his hearer was an eager listener.

Three of the five men who dined with Matthew Sumner that night at the Carfax club were old friends of his: they were Sir Arthur Warren, Mr. Overy-Sinclair and the Marquis de la Brie. Of the other two men, less well known to Sumner, one was Dr. Gumph and the other Mr. E. B. James.

Mr. Matthew Sumner was very pleased with himself. The very names of his guests were in themselves a surety of the success of the dinner-party: they all had tastes enough in common to make the table-talk universal and were yet sufficiently diverse in personality and employment as to guard against a too particular choice of subjects.

Sir Arthur Warren was a Civil Servant of ability and a wide experience: his department had not left its mark

upon him, at least as yet, and his translations of Lopez and Calderon were both scholarly and entertaining. Dr. Gumph, whose voluminous works *Tetradimensional Conceptions of* ϕ and *Lacunæ in the Ionic Theory* are of European reputation, is too well known to need any further note beyond his name: and though it might be imagined that so erudite and esoteric a scientist would have been out of place at Mr. Matthew Sumner's dinner-table, it may be called to mind that Dr. Gumph was also the author of one of the most popular humorous books of the day, *The New Earth.* Overy-Sinclair had been at college with Sumner: he was a landed proprietor of considerable means and was an authority on fans. The Marquis de la Brie was a well-known bibliophile; and had been a close friend of Sumner's for many years. The library of his house in the Rue de Grenelle was considered the third finest library in Paris and his collection of editions from the Giunta Press unique.

Of Mr. E. B. James, Matthew Sumner knew but little. He had met him once or twice before at the Burlington Club, at meetings of the Bibliographical Society and so forth. He seemed to have a wide knowledge of all the arts: he was reputed to be very wealthy: he was a familiar figure at any sale of importance; and he was said to have one of the finest collections of pictures and objects of art in general, in London.

The six men sat down at the round mahogany dinner-table in the alcove of the guests' dining-room of the Carfax club, and attacked the oysters.

Mr. Matthew Sumner was no talker, but he was something which is rather more uncommon, and which is of inestimable value in a host, he was a good listener. Indeed, the talk was worth listening to; so much so that Blount, the head waiter, who had waited upon as many distinguished and entertaining people as any club waiter in London, hovered continually near the table to perform small duties with maybe a greater zeal than was absolutely necessary.

The talk at Mr. Matthew Sumner's dinner-table was certainly worth listening to this evening. Dr. Gumph gave an amusing account of the International Congress of the Astro-Physicists at Zurich and painted a word picture of the duel between Herr Doctor Krautz and the Marquese Allavocini over the encyclic variations in the nebula of Sirius, in which he, as he put it, had "held the sponge" for the Marquese. Warren was humorously reminiscent over the working of the departmental machine and De la Brie told a story in French of the Ministère des Beaux Arts which set the table in a roar. Mr. E. B. James was thus reminded of an affair he had had with the British Museum, and the dry way in which he described the tracking down and eventual holding up of a pantechnicon which was found to contain not a Bacchus but a bedstead, was particularly entertaining. Overy-Sinclair played, with Matthew Sumner, chiefly the part of listener, but he told one good tale about a snuff-box and was not unwitty in commenting on contemporary affairs. But it is not the purpose of this history to retail the table-talk, however witty, of half-a-dozen men, however notable, who sat that night at dinner in the Carfax club. When Sir Arthur Warren writes his *Reminiscences* or Dr. Gumph his *Table-talk* there is little doubt but that this evening will be remembered and the best anecdotes then told repeated with the grace of which Warren is an admitted master and with the humour in which Dr. Gumph is so apt.

The dinner at last came to an end and Sumner and his guests went upstairs to the smoking-room, with the exception of Overy-Sinclair, who left directly after dinner to put in a dutiful appearance at a dance at the house of his godchild. Sir Arthur left soon afterwards, pleading in excuse a post-prandial reference to an agenda with which he would be concerned on the morrow. Dr. Gumph left shortly after ten o'clock with a remark as to the crowded state of the trains on the District Railway and the necessity of reaching his home before the theatre rush began.

For nearly an hour after Dr. Gumph had gone, De la

Brie, James and Sumner sat smoking and talking of a number of subjects, but chiefly of those subjects which appeal most to lovers of books and pictures.

With a slight feeling of envy, Matthew Sumner listened to the accounts of the so many rare and beautiful things that James and De la Brie had from time to time acquired. He wished that his luck in the picking up of bargains had been better, that his knowledge had been deeper and wider, and above all, that his purse had been longer. De la Brie spoke easily of his Caxtons and his Aldine folios, his twelfth-century manuscripts, his Giuntas, his block books, and his bindings, where Sumner had to content himself with the lesser editions from the presses of the great printers or the editiones principes from the less known presses: and Mr. E. B. James talked comfortably of his Constables and his Corots, his Raphael drawings, his Pisanellos, his Fragonards and his Bellinis, as any other man might speak of a Canaletto or a Nasmyth or drawings by Pennell or Muirhead Bone.

The Marquis de la Brie left precisely at eleven o'clock, but Mr. James still sat smoking a cigar with Mr. Matthew Sumner in the corner of the smoking-room.

". . . I picked it up in Padua," James was saying, "I suspected all along what it was, and after Mellish had cleaned it there was no doubt: it is a genuine Giorgione—and one of the most beautiful."

"I envy you very deeply," sighed Mr. Sumner.

James started slightly and looked keenly at Matthew Sumner.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because," replied Sumner, "you are the possessor of so many beautiful things."

"You also love beautiful things? But . . . I don't know . . . is it too late for me to have something to drink before I go? I feel thirsty: just a small Perrier or Tonic Water?"

"Certainly," murmured Sumner: he got up and rang the bell.

He watched James a little wonderingly as he sipped at his Tonic Water. To be so great a possessor of pictures, to be so expert a judge of them and to have so remarkable a sense of their whereabouts as to be able almost to become sensible of a rare picture or statue hidden within the walls of mean houses or cloaked with dirt in the back of shops: such gifts should surely be marked in the owner by some external sign.

But Mr. E. B. James looked like anything else in the world than a great connoisseur. He was a small, commonplace-looking little man, some fifty years of age, with a round, partially-bald head, two weak blue eyes that looked hesitatingly out through a pair of clumsy spectacles, and a drooping, reddish-brown, walrus moustache that was not kept too well trimmed. Had Matthew Sumner passed him in the street and not known him, he would have supposed the man to be a tailor's cutter or, perhaps, an agent for an insurance company, if, indeed, he had noticed him at all. Yet this small man, who now sat by his side sipping from his glass of Tonic Water, lived surrounded by Corots and Duccios and Ghirlandaios and Monets and Romneys and Tintorettos and walked about the streets and squares of the cities of the world finding rare and beautiful things in obscure corners where others would pass on without looking, or looking find but dust and rubbish.

"I should much like to see your pictures," said Sumner, after a minute's silence.

"Would you?" asked Mr. James.

"I should like to see them very much indeed."

"You will see them," replied the other, "on one condition."

"The condition, Mr. James," said Sumner, smiling a little, "is already granted: I am not a dealer, and in any case, I am not in a position to buy such valuable things."

"It is not that, sir. Do you remember your *Arabian Nights*? Do you remember the condition under which Zobeide admitted the Caliph—'You must have eyes, but

no tongue; you must not ask the reason of anything you see, nor speak of anything that does not concern you'? I must ask the same condition, Mr. Sumner, of you to-night."

"It is already granted," replied Matthew Sumner, a little shortly, for he felt the remark a reflection on his behaviour. "I shall not in any way forget that I am your guest."

But Mr. James laid his hand on Sumner's sleeve.

"Be not offended at my request. I in no way impugn your discretion. Believe me, I have a reason in asking this of you."

"Not in the least . . . not at all," murmured Matthew Sumner, hurriedly, already repentant of having taken umbrage in so small a matter.

"Then let us go."

"But," protested Mr. Sumner, "it is already late: and, moreover, pictures are best seen by daylight. May I not come some other time? Any day that's convenient to you?"

"No, no," said the other, shaking his head, "you must come now or you will never see my pictures. If, however, you would rather go to bed . . ."

"I will come with you, now, by all means," said Matthew Sumner, readily; for he was anxious to efface the little annoyance he had already shown.

Mr. Matthew Sumner walked down the steps of the Carfax club into Pall Mall by the side of Mr. E. B. James. Since these two had left the smoking-room and while they were seeking their coats and hats amidst those that remained of members who were late bedgoers or who were sleeping at the club, a sense of wonder had been growing up in the soul of Sumner.

Even the very entrance to his club seemed unfamiliar as he walked out into the street. He was in no mood to talk; and James seemed to have forgotten altogether the man who was walking with him along Pall Mall. The street was deserted and seemed to Sumner to be even more

unreal than the club porch, so that when they passed a temporary island composed of two wooden posts at each end of an oval platform: two pillars from each of which hung a red lamp; this most familiar sight became a brigantine passing to starboard in the quiet sea: a quiet ship, unanswering to the hail of mortal sailormen: a ghost ship. met out of the course of all other ships, and a forbidding sight to mariners.

The two men turned into St. James's Street and walked up the hill to Piccadilly. But to Sumner it seemed no longer a familiar and slight ascent, bounded upon either side by a number of now shuttered shops, whose names he knew by heart, but a high hill climbing to the stars—or, at least, to one star set above the Grafton Galleries that blazed (as Sumner thought) with a sardonic humour upon the peoples and the palaces of earth.

Half-way up the hill, James and Matthew Sumner were stopped by a shambling and shabby figure asking for alms. The man had a three days' beard on his chin: a dirty white neckcloth did duty for a collar and his billycock hat was brown with age and exposure and the rim was decorated with splashes of candle-grease. He held out a shaky and unclean hand and whined:—

"Something to buy a cup of coffee with, guv'nor: I 'ad nothink to eat all day: and it's cruel 'ard at night."

James stared at the man a moment.

"You dirty scoundrel," he said, "why don't you work? However, there're so many scamps in the world, that I don't suppose my support will make any difference."

Mr. E. B. James put his hand in his trouser pocket in search of a coin.

"It ain't for me, guv'nor," said the beggar, "s'elp me God! if it was me alone, I wouldn't beg: I've gotter bit of pride, I 'ave. It's my wife and four little kiddies—what are crying at 'ome and starving. So I can't bear it—Gawd's truth. I can't—so I comes out in the street ter beg a little . . ."

James had taken his hand out of his pocket with a

silver coin between the thumb and first finger. He put it slowly back again.

"So you have a wife and children?" he asked.

"Yes, guv'nor: four little children as is crying to their daddie . . ."

"Then you are a richer man than I am," said Mr. E. B. James, coldly, and turning to Sumner, he added, "Let us go on."

An elderly bachelor in a battered bowler watched the two top-hatted figures pass on up the hill, only interrupting his curses to accost the next passer-by. In the meantime a wife and four little children had died (perhaps by starvation) and help was being asked on behalf of a demoralized widower who, after five years' service and the wounds of war, had been robbed of his pension by a Government bound up in red tape.

Sumner and James turned westward into Piccadilly, and then into Berkeley Street. James said nothing until they were crossing Berkeley Square and then he said suddenly:—

"He was no doubt lying."

"Who?" asked Sumner, whose thoughts were not of the time or place.

"The man who stopped us."

"He most probably was."

"Yes," said James, with a sigh, "I suppose he was: I wish now that I'd given him something."

Matthew Sumner hardly listened to what James was saying. Berkeley Square, at this time of night, and in his present mood, seemed as unreal as Pall Mall and the Street of St. James had seemed, and it was not until he stood on the doorstep of Mr. James's house that he became fully conscious, once again, of his host.

The house of Mr. E. B. James was one of those tall and sombre mansions that are to be found in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square and at the back of Park Lane, that advertise the maximum of wealth and the minimum of ostentation. A pair of black-painted doors stood at

the top of a flight of white stone steps: two large door-knobs of polished brass were fixed in the centre of the doors, like two cyclopean eyes.

Mr. E. B. James placed a tiny key into a miniature keyhole and a moment later the half-door swung open. With a murmured apology, he walked in, followed by Matthew Sumner and switched on the electric light.

"I never keep the servants up, if I am coming back late," he murmured.

Matthew Sumner made some suitable reply: Mr. James switched on more light and helped Sumner out of his overcoat. Sumner looked about him with great interest. The sense of unreality that had haunted him in the streets had gone. His world had once more become tangible: his vision admitted the concrete: he was able to take a delight in things. The small hall in which he stood had an inlaid wooden floor, and a few pictures—one of which he saw to be a Millet and of which he would fain have seen more had his host given him time—hung upon the walls. Each side of the door stood two great china vases upon small ebony tripods carved in the semblance of dragons.

"Surely those are not *famille verte?*" asked Sumner more by the way of compliment than because he thought they could be.

"They're *famille verte* alright," said James, casually, "but so big that no one will believe it: but let us go upstairs."

Matthew Sumner followed his host up the broad staircase. The small feeling of envy that he had known at the Carfax club in hearing James talk of these things had wholly given way to the delight of seeing them; and he now walked up the soft-carpeted staircase in a little fever of excitement at the thought of what he was yet to be privileged to see.

Mr. E. B. James motioned his guest through the door which he held open. Looking about him, Matthew Sumner saw that he was in a large long room, hung with many

pictures. The floor was covered—except for a strip of parquety around the room some four feet in width—with three large carpets, so soft and thick that Sumner feared almost to step upon them, and he had the insane desire to sit down there and then and take off his boots, as one might do before entering a mosque were one a true believer.

There stood in the middle of the room a round table, very wonderfully inlaid with a score of different woods, and upon it was placed an antique tray of silver which carried some flasks and glasses and a syphon of soda-water.

James walked over to the table whilst Sumner still stood hesitant in the middle of the large carpet.

"What will you drink?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, nothing—thanks," said Sumner: his eyes were fixed upon a large painting, alive with sunshine, in a room that was but then lit by three alabaster dishes hung in chains from the ceiling.

"Surely this a Ghirlandaio?"

"Yes, yes," said James, impatiently, "of course it is. What will you have? Whiskey? Brandy? . . . you must drink something."

"Well, just a little soda-water, please."

"Ah, you are like me, perhaps, troubled with a stomach. I have to be very abstemious—or else I suffer for it on the morrow. I make it a rule never to drink any alcohol late in the evening. But to-night—if you will forgive me my rudeness—I will break my rule. There are occasions, Mr. Sumner, when all rules may be broken; and the morrow will have to look after itself; at any rate, I do not anticipate that I shall suffer from a headache to-morrow morning."

Mr. James filled a wide thin glass with soda-water and handed it to Sumner. He filled a small glass with an amber-coloured liquid from one of the flasks. He sipped it delicately.

"A rare brandy," he murmured; and, then, draining the glass at a gulp, he turned to Sumner and said:—

"You want to see my pictures?"

"If I may?"

"It will be my delight to show them to you," said James, "and I know that you will not be as unwise as the good Haroun, though you may have greater cause."

"Enough, sir, enough," said Sumner, curtly, "have I not promised? Why should you doubt that I . . . ?"

Mr. E. B. James glanced keenly at his guest through his large, round spectacles.

"Come, forgive my humour, and see the pictures," he broke in, laying a hand on Sumner's arm for an instant.

He walked over to a picture in a heavy, dull gold frame that was hung in the centre of the room and switched on an electric lamp so placed above the picture as to give the best lighting effect.

It was an almost full-size painting of a nude figure that stood out against a dark background with an amazing insistence. The technique: the drawing: the flesh tints: the value in tone: were very wonderful; but that was not all, and as Sumner stood spellbound before the picture, he knew that he was in the presence of a master.

"What a glorious thing!" he said in a hushed voice, as one might speak in a church. "What drawing! and what an amazing silvery tone in the painting of the flesh: it is like moonlight in winter, and yet warm and living."

"Yes; you see it's painted in tempera: it's a Credi, of course: and the same model as the Venus in the Uffizi: but better, I think—undoubtedly a finer work. Look at the feet and the neck and the modelling of the breasts. Yes, it is Credi at his best."

"It's marvellous," murmured Sumner, "marvellous." But James had gone back to the table.

"Will you have any more soda-water?" he asked, picking up the syphon.

"No, thank you," said Sumner, still gazing at the Credi.

"Then it doesn't matter if the syphon breaks," said Mr. E. B. James, in a tone so different from that in which he had hitherto spoken, that Sumner turned round suddenly to look at him.

The little man came towards him, swinging the syphon to and fro in his right hand, and there was a light in his eyes as strange to Sumner as the tone that had crept into his voice. With a sudden circular movement of his right arm, he swung the soda-water syphon behind him and above his head, bringing it down and forward with all the force of which he was capable into the centre of the picture that had been painted four hundred years ago by one Lorenzo di Credi.

The soda-water syphon struck the painted figure a little below the breast. There was a sound of breaking wood, and a second later Matthew Sumner was gaping at a head and bust and the wallpaper behind the picture. The panel stood shattered to the bottom member of the frame: one white foot stood, as it were, by itself on the edge of destruction: whilst above, the face of the beloved of Lorenzo gazed down serenely on the horrified Sumner, although she had been very thoroughly and completely disembowelled.

"This is an excellently made syphon," said Mr. James, pleasantly, "a most reliable instrument. I was afraid it would break; though, of course, the panel is old and brittle."

Mr. Matthew Sumner at last found his voice.

"God! What did you do that for?" he stuttered. "What? . . . why? . . . it's horrible . . . horrible!"

"Tut-tut," murmured James, soothingly, as one might speak to a child, "have a little more soda-water: there is still some left in this very admirable syphon: or have some brandy." He went to the table and poured out a glassful of the brandy. He handed it to Sumner, who drained the glass at a gulp.

With the empty glass still in his hand, Sumner stared at the broken picture.

"Why? Why?" he cried again. "Mr. James, it's—er—awful. It's unforgivable. What made you do it? What . . ."

"I promised to show you my pictures," broke in James,

coldly, "on one condition: that you asked no questions: that you made no comment. I do not wish, Mr. Sumner, to be under the necessity of reminding you that you are my guest."

"I am sorry," muttered Sumner, weakly.

"Let us look at some of the other pictures," continued James. "Here is a fine piece of work by Pintoricchio."

He switched on some more lights, and Sumner found himself gazing at a crowd of richly-dressed courtiers and ecclesiastics, each one depicted with the labour and minuteness of which that painter is a master.

Matthew Sumner murmured his admiration, but he was still too upset by the destruction of the other picture to give this one the attention and regard he would, under other circumstances, have given.

"The detail is exquisite," James was saying; "note the embroideries on the robe of the prince, and the hair-net of the woman on the right: and the perspective is remarkable. But I think a soda-water syphon is not the ideal instrument for this sort of work. Ha! I know the very thing."

Mr. James trotted across the room and took down a battle-axe, beautifully worked by Cellini, from the opposite wall.

"Let's have the prince's head off," said James, gaily; and a moment later the picture by Pintoricchio was in splinters.

Mr. Matthew Sumner stared wildly about him, but already his host was before another picture. It was the Ghirlandaio; and as the electric light was turned on to the picture, it seemed to Sumner that hot sunshine was already shining through the frame.

"I like this picture so well," said Mr. James, "that I dare not look at it longer"; and with these words he raised his battle-axe and attacked the picture with unusual ferocity.

Mr. Matthew Sumner followed his host like a man in a trance; and but for the pain and horror in his soul he

might have believed this to be no reality, but a dream. Picture after picture along the room was shown, admired and destroyed: Constables, a Watteau, a Memlinc, a Bellini, a Bazzi, a Van Eyck, a Goya . . . : by the battle-axe: by a poker from the fireplace; and by being taken down, as was one of the Constables, and brutally kicked out of the frame with the foot; until Sumner was very nearly physically sick. Once again, Sumner had tried to stop this slaughter.

"Sir," James had said, bitterly, "you seem more careful of my pictures than of your honour."

At last they left the long room and passed into a small square room filled with glass and china.

"The thing I like about glass," said Mr. James to Sumner, as he tossed a Wedgwood vase into a cabinet full of Venetian glass, "is that it is so easy to break . . ."

For an hour or more Mr. Matthew Sumner suffered the tortures of the damned, miserably following Mr. James on his tour of destruction. At length James stopped before a locked door, took a key from his pocket and opened it. Sumner followed him into a small square chamber that was hardly more than a cabinet. The walls were bare and the room unfurnished, save for an easel in the middle of the room upon which was a picture in a plain gilt frame.

"I think you will like this," said James.

Matthew Sumner gazed at the painting and so great was the divine skill of the painter: so compelling the face of the woman painted: that Sumner forgot all the horror that he had gone through, and simply gazed into those eyes that seemed to hold his as they had been those of a live woman; of the woman—if she had indeed been a woman and not more than mortal—whom the painter had painted.

"You know who painted that?" asked James quietly.

"Only one man could paint that," said Sumner, "and his name is Leonardo da Vinci.

"Yes, Leonardo painted that."

"Who was the woman?" murmured Sumner.

"She was Cecilia Gallerani, the mistress of Ludovico Sforza."

"But the picture was lost!" cried Sumner.

"Lost—and found," said Mr. E. B. James, "I found it, begrimed with dirt, in an antique shop in Geneva, two months ago. I cleaned it myself. None but you and I have seen it. None but you and I shall see it."

"No," screamed Sumner, catching hold of James's hand, which still carried the battle-axe, "not that. For the love of God, not that!"

"Mr. Sumner," said James sternly, "your honour is at stake."

"Mr. James," cried Sumner in a hoarse voice, "the sanctity of honour is an individual matter. I gave you my word that I would not interfere—that I would not even so far challenge your liberty as to ask a question. I have few—if any—illusions left about myself; but I have so far endeavoured to cherish some self-respect in the thought—or, at least, in the belief—that I have never yet broken my word. That fetich will now have to be discarded. A time comes—a time has now come—when a man's honour, however valuable it may be to him, becomes, in respect to a larger responsibility, a matter of no importance. You have destroyed in the last hour or two a great number of rare and beautiful things; you have bought them, and by the common interpretation of the law they are yours to do with whatever you will. To what extent you are justified in acting strictly on that interpretation, I do not know: I have protested, and I have—as you have more than once reminded me—overstepped the bounds of honourable conduct in so doing. But this is a matter not only different in quantity; it is different in quality. You have destroyed—it is horrible even to think of it as possibly happening—so many fine pictures. At least, they are pictures which are, for the most part, inferior, or at any rate no greater than other pictures by the same painters that are the common possession of the nations of the world. By your action to-night you have

made the world poorer: but I doubt if you have made it worse: or rather prohibited it from becoming better: you yet may not have made mute the logos or destroyed a dream. I do not mean that Corot and Orcagna, Poussin and Romney, Credi and Tintoretto have not had that which they would say to the world in the pictures you have cut to pieces; but they have also said it elsewhere, and though you have robbed the world of much, you have not robbed it of all."

"And so, Mr. Sumner, you will sacrifice your honour?"

"It is a matter of no importance. I am no longer a man: I am a million. An hundred million—a thousand million, if you will: for I am spokesman not only for the born, but for the unborn. There are but few works of Leonardo extant to-day: five or six: six or seven—my memory fails me—but few: too few. To destroy the sixth or seventh—the seventh or eighth—were a crime—were an immeasurable crime: to destroy the Gallerani were an unforgivable crime.

"Think!—think what you are about to do! Suppose the world—since the death of the Master—had never seen the Gioconda: and it was discovered, but to be destroyed . . . and this—this is greater than the Gioconda.

"Every schoolboy knows the phrase in Pater . . . and generations of men have gazed into those smiling eyes, and have turned away disturbed and sick at heart and weary of questionings and unable to answer the riddle that Leonardo painted. But Leonardo da Vinci was the complete man: and though he set a riddle to the sons of men, he also painted the answer: so that those who ask might not ask in vain: so that those who are troubled might be consoled.

"For the Gioconda is a question to which only Leonardo knew the answer: a mystery of which the Gallerani is the solution. In the Gioconda he asked a question—the riddle of sex—the enigma of love and desire and despair: and Cecilia Gallerani is the answer. For the one is torture and disbelief and mockery, and the other is wisdom and

understanding and repose. They are the two sides of the same picture—the one has been too long hidden—and you are about to withhold from a world that is already weary a testimony to the peace of God."

Mr. E. B. James shook himself free from Matthew Sumner and raised the battle-axe in his right hand. Sumner tried to snatch the axe from him, only to receive the handle of the axe between his eyes. He fell forward, stunned, on to the floor.

When Mr. Matthew Sumner became conscious he found himself lying on a sofa in the long room around the walls of which hung the fantastic remains of pictures. Mr. E. B. James was kneeling beside him, bathing his forehead with some water in an engraved metal basin. Matthew Sumner stared about him, unable at once to remember where he was, and then, as his gaze fell upon James, a horror grew in his eyes.

"The Leonardo?" he groaned.

"Yes: yes," said James, sympathetically; "drink some of this."

He held a glass to Sumner's lips.

"That's better," he muttered, as the brandy brought a tinge of colour into Sumner's cheeks, "you'll soon be all right now. A thousand apologies for knocking you out as I did. But I had to, you know."

Sumner stared around the room. He shivered as he looked at the shattered panels and slashed canvases.

"Why do you do this?" he asked faintly. "Are you mad . . . mad?"

"We are all mad—more or less," said James, quietly, "but I am not mad in the sense in which you ask that question. For my actions are the effects of a reasoned conclusion."

"A reasoned conclusion?" repeated Matthew Sumner.

"Yes. I owe you some sort of explanation in return for my discourtesy in knocking you down. Listen—for I must be brief.

"Once upon a time there was born into the world a

man with a large patrimony and a love of beautiful things. I shall not give pain to myself or weary you with any account of his childhood or of his early youth: but even before he left the University of Oxford where he was educated, he had decided to devote his life to the study and acquisition of beautiful things and especially of pictures.

"In youth there is much temptation to depart from a particular course and to dissipate one's energy in a variety of ways: all such temptations, this young man successfully overcame. Love, friendship, good-fellowship and even worldly ambition were disregarded in the pursuit of Beauty. The passion for beautiful things—like all other passions—grows with indulgence. As the years progressed, this man became more and more concerned only with things: with beautiful things: more and more a recluse: more and more out of the world: more and more out of touch with humanity: more and more a virtuoso: more and more self-contained, self-sufficient and alone.

"By the buying and selling of pictures and other works of art he made much money, which was in turn spent in buying more pictures and furniture and china and glass. When he was just over thirty years old—there was a woman. She was more beautiful than any picture he possessed: or than any pictures painted by Goya or by Raphael or by Titian or by Leonardo; whose limbs were more perfect than they had been chiselled by the hand of Phidias: whose feet among the flowers Botticelli might have drawn. And she came in unto him; and for a little time he doubted; but presently he hardened his heart and went away. For what had he, whose life was forfeit to the beauty that cannot die, to do with any earthly frailty? She was more beautiful than all his pictures; but she would grow old and bear children and grow ugly . . .

> "'mirabar celerem fugitiva ætate rapinam,
> et, dum nascuntur, consenuisse rosas.'

was a thought ever with him.

"'O, that so fair a flower so soon should fade
And through untimely tempest fall away.'

"But his pictures and his vases would always be with him and always beautiful, and they would never grow old and ill-favoured. And there were yet others . . ."

Mr. James swayed a little where he stood, and then, pulling himself together with an obvious effort, continued:—

"So I lived for these things—these beautiful things: but yet dead things . . . and now . . . now . . . they have deserted me after so many years' labour in their service: I have no longer any joy in them. They cannot talk to me when I am alone: they cannot comfort me when I am unhappy: they cannot tend me when I am sick: they will not mourn for me when I am dead. But they shall no more tempt others—ha, ha!—I have had my revenge . . . they shall no more wreck the lives of others as they have mine. So many Medusæ, they shall no longer with their basilisk stare turn the hearts of mortal lovers into stone . . . but that is just what they did not do: had it now been petrified into the enduring rock . . . it was but a temporary dispensation . . ."

Mr. E. B. James fell to the floor in a heap. But he waved Matthew Sumner away, who was bending over him.

"Leave me . . . it . . . it is not painful: a remedial drug: I will . . . shortly . . . be asleep. Leave me . . . The Leonardo . . ."

"Yes: yes?" stuttered Sumner. "You did not . . ."

"It is destroyed," said James, in a whisper, "but . . . it was not Leonardo."

"That," said Sumner, slowly, gazing into the eyes of the dying man, "is a lie."

"I had hoped you would believe me . . . but . . . but you are too good a critic . . . I thought I had my revenge on them . . . but they have had their revenge on me. I could not live longer with them . . . and now . . . now I cannot live without them."

Matthew Sumner filled a glass with brandy from the

table and held it to Mr. James's lips: but he knocked it out of Sumner's hand.

"It is no good; and I would die sober . . . Leave me . . . there is no danger for you . . . I have already left a confession of suicide among my papers. Go . . . go away."

He slipped out of Matthew Sumner's arms and fell prone on the carpet.

"*In manus Tuas* . . ." he whispered, so softly that Matthew Sumner could scarcely hear the words . . . "*in manus Tuas* . . . *Tuas* . . .

> "'torquatus volo parvulus
> matris e gremio suæ
> porrigens teneras manus
> dulce rideat ad patrem
> semihiante. . . .'

"No: no . . . that is wrong . . . *in manus Tuas commendo* . . ."

But the last words were lost to Mr. Matthew Sumner, for the spirit had already passed into the hands of Him to whom it would be commended.

CHAPTER XIV: THE ENTERTAINING STORIES OF THE THINGS THAT TALKED

THE Café des Remparts is, as its name suggests, built upon the town walls. It is a small and very modest place, wedged in between the large and noisy Café du Midi and the blank wall of the Lycée Paletas; and one might live for many months in the town without so much as drinking a bock at one of the four small tables outside its doors.

But those who have once been there, commonly go there again; at least if they be quiet and simple people, who have a distaste for noise and a love of being alone and who ask no more for dinner than an *omelette fine,* bread, the cheese of the country and a bottle of ordinary wine. The Café des Remparts was just such a place in which Mr. Matthew Sumner loved to dine, and, a little after seven o'clock on a particular day in early June, any one walking along the ramparts and stopping before the café might have seen Sumner sitting alone at a round iron table eating an omelette and drinking some red wine with pleasure and without haste.

The sun had just slipped behind the Cévennes hills, and the plain that lay stretched out below was already in shadow. Beyond, the Pic St. Loup stood out against the red sky, as though it had been cut out of black paper with a pair of scissors: as though it had been a futurist poster in black and scarlet, without perspective and without reality and without form.

But gradually the red light died out of the sky. For a little while the hills loomed indistinctly against a silver canopy, until that too faded and the hills melted into the

sky, and the sky melted into the hills, and little fires awoke in the plain, and the stars grew brighter and more numerous and it was night.

Mr. Matthew Sumner still sat alone in front of the café on the ramparts. He had eaten his omelette and some cheese and some bread; and a bottle of dark-coloured glass, half full of red wine, still stood before him on the table.

He turned his head half around and called: —

"Eh, bien, Madame, et ce café?"

"Oui, oui, mon p'tit: je l'fais."

A moment later a large woman came out of the café carrying a conical glass in one hand and a bottle in the other. She was dressed in a black dress, unbuttoned at the neck, and with the sleeves turned up to the elbows: her black hair was pulled back and bound tightly in a coil on the top of her head, and her upper lip was darkened by a slight black moustache.

She placed the glassful of black coffee on the table in front of Sumner.

"Du cognac?"

"Oui, Madame."

The large woman poured some cognac from the bottle she carried into the glass until the black liquor rose to the rim and spilt over on to the table. She picked up the bottle of wine, but Sumner said:—

"Laissez ça là."

"Bien, M'sieu."

The Widow Mesnôit went back into the café. Sumner stirred his café-cognac and gazed contentedly into the darkness. He took a blackened pipe from his pocket and blew noisily through it: he filled it with caporal: he struck a match, waiting patiently until the pale-blue, sulphurous flame had turned to yellow, and held the flame above the bowl. He drew sharply at his pipe to cause the tobacco to become well alight: he sipped intermittently at his coffee.

The three other tables in front of the café were empty. Except for a faint hum of talk and a little clatter of cups

and glasses from the adjoining café, the night was very silent and still.

Mr. Matthew Sumner lost himself among his thoughts: he was hardly conscious of where he was, of the pipe he was smoking, of the coffee he was drinking or of the table at which he sat. He was in that comfortable, after-dinner frame of mind, when one thinks, without any effort or conscious selection, of a great number of interesting and agreeable things. He had just spent a month in Rome and his mind dwelt upon the many pleasant people he had met there and on the hospitality and kindness he had received from his friends: he reviewed certain odd and entertaining things that had occurred to him as he had drifted northward, by easy stages, to the town where he now was: some amusing evenings in the city of Turin: some old friends he had run into in Nice—although the season was well over—and, lastly, the slow and tedious journey to Marseilles, which had been relieved of any monotony, and made to seem disagreeably short instead of long and wearisome, by so charming a travelling companion as Mademoiselle Pauline Lacour of the Comédie Française. He sighed softly to himself at the thought of how one meets pleasant and sympathetic people but for a few hours and with little chance of ever meeting with them again: he wondered if Mademoiselle Pauline was married: he was wondering if he might venture to call upon her at the theatre in the town, where the company were due to act shortly, on the strength of a chance railway acquaintance—an acquaintance that had been begun by a hat-box falling out of the rack on to his head—when a voice at his elbow said:—

"He, he! You won't see much of *her* while she's here."

It was lucky that Sumner had not yet lifted his glass of coffee, as he had been about to do, to drink from it, or he would certainly have dropped it in his surprise. He stared about him, altogether put out of countenance by so accurate a divining of his thoughts. Moreover he was alone. Madame Mesnôit, it is true, was somewhere at

the back of the café talking to two clerks from the post office and a *huissier;* but the front of the café was deserted, and the voice seemed to come from somewhere immediately in front of where Sumner was sitting.

"Her time will be fully taken up—he, he!" continued the voice.

It was not a pleasant voice. It was the voice of an old man, uneven in tone and possessed of a wheezy impropriety of accent which one instinctively associates with the public bar and the least reputable of race-meetings.

"Who's that?" said Sumner, in a tone equally divided between surprise and choler, "who's that talking?"

"He, he!" chuckled the voice, "he, he! he, he! . . . Had you there. You'd never guess—if you guessed all night. He, he! It's me: the bottle."

"The bottle?" echoed Sumner, blankly.

"You didn't know that bottles could talk, I suppose. Ha, ha! But they can; and damn fine talkers they are too . . . some are."

"Bottle? What bottle?"

"Come, come: pull yourself together. The bottle in front of you, of course: the wine-bottle, on the table."

"I'm mad," muttered Matthew Sumner, "or, perhaps, simply drunk."

"Oh, no, you're not," said the bottle, "you're quite all right. It simply happens that for once in a while you are able to hear us talk. All bottles talk, you know . . . loquacious fellows: but it isn't very often that any one is able to understand us."

"But . . . but, you're talking English: are you an English bottle?

("This is absurd—talking to a wine-bottle: silly, ridiculous," muttered Sumner to himself; but each moment it seemed to grow a more ordinary, a more common, occurrence: as though to talk with the bottle of wine on one's table was no more than to talk with the waiter or with one's next-door neighbour.)

"No, I was made in Bocheland. It isn't what I talk: I talk bottle-talk. As it happens that you are able to understand, you hear me speak English: if you were a Frenchman, you'd hear me talking French: or if you were a Portugoose, you'd hear Portugoose."

"Yes, yes: I see," answered Mr. Sumner, politely and quite untruthfully.

"Oh yes, we bottles are quite a talkative crowd: as you might imagine. We knock about the world a lot; and we see a lot of life: he, he! There isn't much we don't see, I can tell you . . . except, of course, the lemonade-bottles; although I am told that they can tell tales about the ladies, that even we . . . he, he! . . . but, then, no self-respecting wine-bottle would ever be seen talking to a teetotaller."

"Oh," said Sumner, who felt expected to say something.

"Yes, of course, the champagne-bottles put on airs, and think themselves . . ."

"How in the devil did you know what I was thinking about?" broke in Matthew Sumner, suddenly.

"Ha, ha! I thought that would surprise you. You see, we bottles, and what you call inanimate things, have the power of seeing into men's minds: you see, it's a sort of compensation for not being able to move about themselves. We bottles, for instance, can see all that goes on in the minds of those who drink out of us: and very entertaining it is sometimes—he, he!—very amusing and instructive, I can tell you."

The bottle said the last four words in that peculiar tone which made Sumner certain that had the bottle been not a bottle, but a mortal man, he would, at this point, have dug him, Sumner, in the ribs.

"Now the last time I was drunk," the bottle continued, "happened, funnily enough, to be by one of your countrymen—he, he!—he was one of the b'hoys, he was: and he was a poet: at least, he thought he was: but I'm no judge of that sort of thing myself.

"That was in a small eating-place off the Boul'Mich',

where they gave you a fair meal for two-fifty with a bottle of vin-ordinaire thrown in. I wasn't so down in the world then as I am now," continued the bottle, with a sigh, "I was then Paulliac at four-fifty: indeed, there was a time when I carried Lafitte—for I am an old wine-bottle now: an old bottle—few of us live as long or see as much as I have seen . . . but I was going to tell you about the poet; *poet*—he, he!"

"I'm going to have a little more out of you first," said Matthew Sumner, "I suppose that won't stop you talking?"

"Nothing will stop me talking," replied the bottle, simply; whilst Mr. Matthew Sumner, with a coolness that astonished him, picked the bottle up in the middle of a sentence and filled his glass.

"A poet—um—yes. He sat by himself at a little table in the Restaurant au Coin Doré and Charles brought me up to him. He was in an ill humour when I arrived, and he cursed Charles like a pick-pocket because I wasn't warm enough: so Charles took me away again and put me in the hot water until I nearly cracked. When I was brought back to the table, I was in about as bad a temper as the young man was. Poet, indeed!—pouf! he *was* in a bad temper. He'd been working all the morning—at least since eleven o'clock, for he was out till late the night before, and had not got out of bed before ten—yes, he had been at work from eleven till nearly half-past twelve, when he went out to lunch, on a poem. He'd only managed to write a few lines, and now he was fed up with them. The post that afternoon had brought him two envelopes of rejected MSS. from editors, as he said, without any critical acumen, but at whose actions, nevertheless, he was uncommonly upset. That, on top of the failure of his labour of the morning (not to mention the night before), had thoroughly unnerved him. His spirit was at a low ebb. And now he asked himself, could he write at all? He thought he was a poet; but was he *really* a poet? After all, wouldn't he have done better to go back into

his father's office and become an estate agent? Why was he wasting his time here? Why?—in God's name why?

"He took me up and filled his glass automatically.

"Yes: he would go back to London. He ran his long fingers through his bright brown hair that fell uncut over his ears, and looked more miserable than ever. He had made up his mind: a few days to put his things in order—to say good-bye to his friends in the Quartier—and then for the office of Goosh, Preston and Goosh, Auctioneers and Estate Agents. He picked up the glass and gulped down some of the Paulliac. If, sir you had the eye of a bottle and could look into men's minds as you are being drunk, you would be much amused at the changes that take place therein. The bacilli of fermentation are busy little fellows: they waste no time: they get to work at once. Christopher Preston, younger son of Mr. H. L. Preston of Croydon and Queen Victoria Street, looked perceptibly less miserable even before he had put down the glass again upon the table. He emptied the glass a moment later and his eye, which had been dull, became brighter, and he shook himself a little and smoothed back the long hair that had fallen across his forehead, and the business of an auctioneer and estate agent seemed to appear a much gayer affair than he could have believed possible five minutes earlier. He even began to consider that he had a *flair* for the business: he pictured the surprise of confidential clerks at his business acumen: the delight of his father at his handling of problems in real estate: the chagrin of his elder brother at his being outclassed. What wonderful little beggars these bacilli are! He almost called to Charles for a time-table to look up the London trains then and there.

"He filled his glass again, and busied himself with his omelette. He sipped a little of the wine. He wondered why he had been so much in the blues over the business.

"'*Contre les cafards,*' was his unspoken toast as he raised his glass. Selling houses must, after all, be great fun. Why, there was an element of romance in it: there

was poetry in it. He might become famous as the poet-auctioneer: that sounded rather jolly. One could write poems about houses—something like this perhaps:—

"'I've let a house in Ponders End,
But what the tenant has to spend
On water-pipes the plumbers mend
Will be a pretty sum;
The walls are damp and stained and old;
The house is let; the tenant sold;
I've been and cashed his cheque I hold
To pay the premium.'

"And then one might compose one's advertisements in verse:—

"'There's a house to sell by the grey North Sea,
As fine a house as a house can be:
Drawing-room, dining-room, bedrooms seven:
You won't find a better house in Heaven.
Solidly built on a gravel bed;
There's a servant's hall and a motor-shed:
A tennis lawn of the finest grass;
Company's water and company's gas.
Five minutes' walk from the railway station
(Chit to view upon application
To Messrs. Goosh, Preston and Goosh, 9*b*,
Queen Victoria Street, E.C.).'

"Yes: the business of an estate agent was not so dull a one as is commonly supposed.

"Mr. Christopher Preston drank a little more wine. Ha! then there was the haunted house . . . *vers libre* was the medium for that:—

"'A house!
That will not sell.
Dear God! that will not sell.
A house, built in a little wood,
Of twisted trees, odd, little stunted trees,
Like large umbrellas—
Large green umbrellas
With crookèd handles.

"'A wooden gate that creaked
However much
You oiled
The hinges.
A gravel path that coiled
Around an oval bed where no flowers grew
Up to the door,
Which had been painted green when it was new,
But the paint
Long since had peeled away.

"'There was a knocker on the door,
But so much rusted
You could not raise it;
There was a bell
Which, if you pulled,
A clash and clangour sounded through the house:
The empty house:
An empty echoing
As though it had been through the halls of Hell.
And those who had the courage
To ring,
Stayed not for the door to open,
But ran away
Along the twisted path,
And through the little wood of twisted trees
Like large umbrellas—
Green umbrellas with crookèd handles;
And through the wooden gate that creaked however much
You oiled
The hinges.'

"By George! that's good—quite good," murmured the poet to himself, and he tossed off what was left of his second glass of wine with an air very different from that with which he had drunk the first. He took a dog-eared note-book from his pocket and began writing in it in little jerks, biting the end of his pencil in between whiles.

"'Here, Julia,
Julia Sommerville,
Miss Julia Sommerville,
Lived, and here died.

For forty years alone within this house
She lived.
The few who knew her
Said
She was the gentlest creature
God ever made.
She was belovèd of the poor, who lived
Much on her bounty;
And when she died
You would have thought no house could have been haunted
By a spirit such as hers,
So calm and so contented;
And if it was
Not any should be daunted
At meeting her sweet spirit in any room or passage,
Or standing hesitant upon the pathway,
White in the moonlight:
Or in the shadow of the little twisted wood
Of stunted trees
Like green umbrellas.'

"The poet took me up and poured himself out another glass of the red wine, and I, peeping into his mind (for I am a curious fellow), saw that a further change had taken place. He was no longer thinking about Messrs. Preston and Goosh, Auctioneers and Estate Agents: he was no longer concerned with houses nor even with haunted houses; once more he was a poet; free to wander where he would: to see all things: to interpret all things. His head was full of beautiful words: of rhymes and metres and intricate patterns of sound. He knew he was a poet; and not only a poet, but a poet by pre-ordination: a poet with a work waiting to be done: a prophet as well as a maker: a bringer of happiness to the sons of men.

"Yet he had doubted himself: he had fallen into the pit of despair: as Bunyan has it, into the Slough of Despond. Fool he! He even thought of going back to London, and no more to write songs. Silently he prayed to God to forgive him for his little faith. He, he! wonderful little fellows those bacilli, aren't they?"

The bottle chuckled for a little while in a manner that Matthew Sumner found peculiarly offensive. "It doesn't

seem to me a particularly amusing story," he said, severely.

"He, he! no? Doesn't it indeed? He, he! he, he! Well, perhaps I'll tell you something funnier later on."

"What did the young man do?" asked Sumner.

"What did he do? He kept jotting down his lines and parts of lines into his note-book. Directly after dinner, he was thinking to himself, I must go home and get to work on this. Put three or four solid hours' labour into it: burn the midnight oil: work—how does Stevenson say? —'like a miner in a land-slip.' Hitherto, I have wasted too much time: I lacked faith a little in myself, and, therefore, perhaps, did not work hard enough. I paid too much notice to the opinion of others: I was discouraged by mere commercial men like the editors of papers: the world was too much with me. But I know that I am a poet: that the supreme gift is mine . . . the sacred flame . . . but it must be tended: carefully cherished, and it must be fed with oil—with midnight oil. One must forego many things if one will be a poet. One must deny oneself to one's friends: one must live laborious days: and one must eschew the bottle—like the devil.

"He emptied his third glass of wine and once more filled it.

" 'As soon as I have finished this,' he thought to himself, 'I'll go home: it were foolish to leave a third of a bottle of wine at four-fifty the bottle to be drunk by Charles.'

"He began to picture himself as he would be that evening at work on his epic, 'Marsyas by Mistake,' sitting alone in his small room in the Rue de L'Estrapade, and the table in front of him strewn with sheets of paper: with books piled around him, on the table, on the floor, on the other chair, even on the bed itself: the gas-jet burning steadily within its cracked glass globe above him like a star; and outside, the clock in the church of St. Etienne chiming each quarter of an hour unheeded, until light began to glow in the uncurtained window and it was time

to go to bed. This picture was very clear in his mind as he drank his fourth glass of wine.

"But—he, he!—I've told you what humorous fellows these little bacilli are, haven't I? With the fifth glass of wine, which was really quite excellent at the modest price of four-fifty the bottle, the scene of the poet-scholar, working until the sun rose and peeped into his humble bed-sitting-room, began to grow faint. Writing poetry was not like any common terrestial labour; like copying out an extract or adding up accounts: mere mechanic employments. To write poetry one must be in the mood to write poetry. The Muse is like a mettlesome horse: she can be persuaded, but not driven. Poetry can only be written when the writer is inspired: when, so to speak, one *must* write—willy-nilly: and . . . 'it needs heaven-sent moments for this skill.' It was silly to suppose that one could do good work, sweating it out for hours, late at night, as if one was writing for the magazines; and, as Mr. Christopher Preston tossed off his fifth glass of wine he reminded himself, with much pride and self-complacency, that he was not a journalist, he was a poet. He began his sixth glass of wine (which left me empty on the table) with the intention of doing an hour's work before he went to bed—just to fix the ideas that had been floating about in his head all the evening: but that could wait till later, and he would have a black coffee and a glass of cointreau before he left the Coin Doré. After all was said and done, folk could talk about the 'midnight oil' as much as they pleased; but it was only your decadents—unhealthy neurotics—who worked at night. The morning was the right time for work. That was the natural time in which to do one's work: aye, and one's best work too. To do any work at all after dinner was really wrong—quite wrong. He sipped at his wine, and then shouted for Charles: he ordered the coffee and the liqueur.

"He drank the remainder of the Paulliac before Charles came back. He was quite sure about it now. It was fatal to work at night: it was bad for one's health, besides

being useless. One was simply dull next morning, that was all: you can't burn a candle at both ends. No: the morning was the time to work. Ah, ha! he would get up early, really early to-morrow morning, and put in a long morning's work; when he was quite fresh. That was the idea. He'd start work at eight and he wouldn't lunch till one. That would give him five clear hours: he'd do that every day: why, he'd finish his epic in no time at that rate. But he must go to bed early: at least, at a reasonable hour, so as to be fresh in the morning for his work."

For a moment the bottle was silent.

"I wonder if your young friend did go to bed early?" murmured Matthew Sumner, as he smiled, thoughtfully, at the black face of the bottle.

"He, he!" gurgled the bottle, "he, he! he, he! I don't know about that. Charles took me away before he had finished his cointreau. But I know what he was thinking about as I was being carried out of the room."

"What was that?"

"He was wondering—he, he!—he was wondering if little Lucienne Clairvaux would be at the Bal Bullier that evening."

Mr. Matthew Sumner's thoughts were far away: he was, perhaps, remembering his own youth: he was no longer conscious of the Café des Remparts and of things around him. He was once more walking along the Boule-Miche; meeting many familiar faces and remembering names that he had long forgotten.

"Clever little beggars, those bacilli," chuckled the bottle.

Matthew Sumner remembered where he was.

"All of us, I suppose, were poets when we were young," he said, with a sigh.

"He, he!" laughed the bottle, "he, he! But the old men were great fun too. He, he! I had dinner with two old duffers the time before I was drunk by the poet. But they weren't poets. Ha, ha! no: they weren't poets. They were—at least they thought they were—men of

the world, men of business. One was. He had a small silk factory at Cuset, just outside of Lyons; and he was reputed to be worth quite a large sum of money. But he was a mean old man, for all that. He might have stood his old friend Fourchas a bottle of the bubbly—it was fifteen francs the bottle at Mère Pichon's—particularly as he had only asked Fourchas to dinner because he wanted something out of him. A mean fellow was Vaudon: a mean old man. So, instead of sending Victor for a bottle of champagne, he sent for me, at six-fifty; I was Palmer-Margaux in those days.

"The two old men sat opposite each other at the rectangular iron table under the plane-trees in front of the Restaurant Pichon, and Victor came out and put me on the table between them with a flourish: as much as to say: 'This is *wine,* Monsieur Fourchas: see what entertainment Monsieur Vaudon is providing for you'; for Vaudon was an old client of Mère Pichon and Victor was no fool.

" 'You have warmed it a little, the Margaux?' asked Vaudon; not because he doubted it, but because he wanted Fourchas to be quite certain of what he was drinking.

" 'Yes, yes, Monsieur: it is the true temperature,' said Victor, placing his hand around me with a caressing motion.

" 'Drink up your Byrrh,' said Vaudon, 'here is the soup.'

"The two men tossed off their apéritif: Vaudon picked me up, and, first having emptied a teaspoonful of the wine into his own glass, filled Fourchas' glass to the brim.

"Fourchas raised his glass ceremoniously.

" 'To your good health' he said.

" 'To your good health,' replied Vaudon, and the two men, tucking their napkins carefully into their collars, set to work on the *croûte au pot.*

"Charles Vaudon was a rotund little man, with a bald head: a small tuft of white hair over each ear: two bead-like eyes: a drooping white moustache; and a double,

clean-shaven chin. He was dressed in a suit of dull black cloth: he wore long, stiff-starched cuffs with thin mauve stripes; and a watchchain of silver gilt, stretched across his waistcoat, carried a bunch of masonic emblems as well as the watch.

"Isidore Fourchas was tall and thin: his head was quite bald and polished like an ivory ball on the top; and he had a long black beard. He wore a pepper-and-salt suit and boots with cloth tops, and he habitually carried an untidy umbrella whatever happened to be the state of the weather. He was a Government official of some importance in the town, and he knew very well why his old friend Vaudon had asked him to dinner.

"But he wasn't going to let Charles Vaudon see that he saw through this little business of the dinner: this little dinner given to his old friend Fourchas for old time's sake: oh, dear me, no. He wasn't an imbecile, was Isidore Fourchas; and he enjoyed a good dinner—when somebody else paid for it. So he drank to the health of his host and talked a little sentimentally of the days when they had both been younger than they were now. 'Dost thou remember . . .?' he asked of Vaudon, and Vaudon, with a little help, duly remembered.

"'And dost thou remember . . .?' asked Vaudon in turn: and Fourchas remembered; remembered more easily as he emptied his glass of wine: remembered happenings and certain occasions, the which, perhaps, he might with propriety have forgotten. But then Vaudon and Fourchas were very old friends.

"But as the level of the wine inside me grew lower, Isidore Fourchas, though he remembered many things: though he remembered even the name of Babet Duval and the fuss there had been about the business, and how Vaudon had escaped out of the window in his shirt and trousers: though he remembered this and certain other things —very humorous episodes—yet he began to forget one thing. He began to forget that Charles Vaudon had asked him to dinner for a particular reason: that Vaudon

had asked him to dinner to get something out of him. Wonderful little fellows, these bacilli that live in bottles, aren't they?

"But perhaps I am not rightly describing the state of Fourchas' mind as he was picking the white flesh from off the thin leg-bones of the little frogs and sipping pleasurably at his second glass of wine. He hadn't forgotten the reason which had made Vaudon ask him to dinner. He remembered the reason perfectly well; but he forgot that it was a reason for this hospitality: it was simply a fact that was in his mind; and as he emptied his second glass of wine while he was eating his *poulet en casserole,* by an odd process of inversion it became clear to him that his reason for accepting Charles Vaudon's invitation was not only in order that he might enjoy his company and talk over old times, but chiefly because he hoped to be able to do him some slight service. This was a change of mind rather out of the ordinary, for Isidore Fourchas had sat down at table knowing that a service would later be asked of him, and he had then fully made up his mind that he would not in any way be bamboozled by his old friend into giving a helping hand to that young scamp Pierre Vaudon.

"The funny thing about these little bacilli, sir, is that they act in quite opposite ways with different people. You can never tell, in fact, which way they are going to jump. They make some folk cynical: they make other folk sentimental: some they make easy: some difficult: you can never count, beforehand, on the effect that they will have upon a man's mind. That is why the life of a bottle is so very interesting: so entertaining.

"Now before I was empty, Isidore Fourchas had quite made up his mind to find a nice, comfortable little post for young Pierre Vaudon in the Préfecture. After all, what is the good of being a Government official: a highly placed official—and Fourchas stroked his silky black beard pompously as he thought of how very highly placed he was—what is the use of being in such a position: of hav-

ing such influence: if you cannot use it at times—circumspectly, of course—to help a friend: an old friend? and Charles was a very old friend indeed. Yes, he knew just the job for Pierre: a neat little post with a comfortable salary and nothing whatever to do: a sinecure: a perfect sinecure. He waited expectantly for Charles Vaudon to mention Pierre.

"Now old Vaudon had asked Fourchas to dinner with the one and only object of trying to persuade him to find a berth—a suitable berth—for Pierre in the Government service. Such a post was just the sort of thing for Pierre: he had beautiful manners and an extreme dislike for any kind of work. Vaudon had three great disappointments in his life—and Pierre was one of them: the other two were the speed with which his wife lost her figure and good looks after she had married him, and his failure to achieve the distinction of being a member of the Legion of Honour. Luckily Charles, the elder brother, took after his father—and was now junior partner in the silk factory: in the management of which he showed marked ability. But Pierre was a waster: a nincompoop: a *flâneur*. He thought he could paint pictures: he thought he could do all kinds of silly things in which there was no money. He was continually getting into scrapes with women: most of whom might have known better. He was always hard up for money and he was an observed figure in the least reputable cafés in the town. But Pierre would do very well in the Préfecture: if the right sort of post could be found for him: and Isidore Fourchas was the man to work the oracle.

"With this thought in his mind, Charles Vaudon had sat down to dinner, but before he had finished his first glass of wine he began to have doubts about it. Was such a post suitable for a young man like Pierre? Vaudon was not at all sure that it was. He finished his glass of wine. He was sure that it was not. Would Pierre be likely to behave better in the Préfecture than he had elsewhere? Devil a doubt of it! Vaudon had got him into one or

two nice little jobs before: with old Scholmer, for instance; and then there had been trouble with the daughter before the young rascal had been there three months. Heaven only knew what trouble he might not get into at the Préfecture: supposing he embezzled public monies? Good God!

"By the time Vaudon had drunk his second glass of wine he had come to regard his notion of trying to find Pierre a job as a regrettable weakness. His duty as a father forbade such a course. As the young man had made his bed, so he must lie on it. It would be the making of him too, the young puppy. He had put up with the young man's vagaries long enough. Henceforth, he would have to shift for himself.

"Before I had been quite emptied, Charles Vaudon had decided to say nothing whatever to Fourchas about Pierre and was patting himself on the back for the strength of character he had shown in the matter.

"But by the time Victor was bringing the coffee and the cognac, Isidore Fourchas could no longer withhold his generous impulses.

" 'I have been just thinking, Charles,' he said, throwing himself back in his chair and picking his teeth thoughtfully with a wooden toothpick from the table, 'I have been thinking that I know of the very job for young Pierre.'

" 'No, no' murmured Vaudon, waving a fat and deprecatory hand.

" 'But yes, my friend, but yes. The very thing. Decent salary and nothing to do: just suit the young scamp. I daresay if I use my influence I can get it for him.'

" 'Then don't, my dear fellow, don't.'

" 'Hey? But what are you going to do with the young man? Are you going to put him in the business?'

" 'God forbid!' ejaculated Charles Vaudon.

" 'Well, this job will just suit him.'

"But old Vaudon shook his head.

" 'I have done with the young man. He must make his

own way. He has had chances enough. I've disowned him.'

"I do not know how the matter ended, for I was taken away while Fourchas was still trying to persuade Charles Vaudon, who became more obstinate every moment, to let him help the young man."

"I wonder what was the outcome?" mused Sumner.

"He, he! *I* don't know. But I can make a shrewd guess. I've no doubt next morning old Vaudon was very repentant and regretful: I've no doubt his wife—who was a large woman with a corresponding temper—had some words to say in the matter. Vaudon, you may be sure, went round to see Fourchas about getting that post, only to find his old friend very polite and cold, secretly congratulating himself on his good fortune that Vaudon had not accepted his offer the night before. He, he! funny little rascals, these bacilli, aren't they?"

Matthew Sumner sipped thoughtfully at the wine in his glass.

"I suppose you are looking into my brain and seeing what the bacilli are doing there?" he asked.

"He, he! he, he! I see you're by way of being a wag. Yes, I've been doing that all the time. You were not ready to listen to me at first, you know. Oh no, you weren't: *I* know. But now you want to hear more: you're getting curious: you want to hear my next little story."

"Well, what is your next tale?" said Sumner, a little brusquely.

"He, he! he, he! . . . he, he!" chuckled the bottle, "the next tale I'm going to tell you is a very funny one. It will make you laugh. There's a lady in it—he, he!—a very comic affair.

"I was full of Lafitte in those days—Smith Haut Lafitte: a great vintage; and I lived in the cellars of the Restaurant Charles Lepic, just off the Boulevard des Italiens. I was brought up by Auguste, the wine waiter, and placed with much ceremony in a silver-plated bucket of just tepid water beside a small table. I could not see the faces

of the diners from where I stood in the bucket on the floor: all I could see on one side was a pair of dark blue trousers, and beneath them a pair of silk socks: black silk socks with a small white diamond patterns; and a pair of dark brown leather shoes. On the other side I saw—he, he!—a pair of the best-shaped ankles I have ever seen, and—he, he!—I have seen some: a pair of grey silk stockings: the edge of a dark blue skirt and a shot-silk petticoat and a pair of small shoes of grey suède. But presently Auguste took me out of the bucket and put me on the table and I was able to look about me. The man at the table was, I should say, about forty or forty-five years of age. He had a large round head: he was clean-shaven and he wore a single eye-glass at the end of a thin, black silk cord. His coat was very open in front, showing much of a soft white silk shirt: he wore a butterfly collar of a very fashionable shape and a neatly-tied black bow tie covered with little silver spots. His black hair was very carefully brushed and shone with an almost metallic lustre due to the hair tonic that he used. He carried a dark blue silk handkerchief, very delicately scented with Coty's La Rose. He gave one the immediate impression of being connected with the stage—on the financial side.

"The girl who sat opposite him was quite young: not more than twenty years old, I should say. She was very pretty. She had a small, round, baby face and a pair of large blue eyes. Her beautifully-shaped head was covered with a mass of silky hair of the colour of old gold. It was parted in the middle and hung down in a thick curtain on either side and at the back and was cut short and evenly around on a level with her chin. And when she shook her head and laughed, as she did a great deal, her silken curtain of hair swayed to and fro and looked more lovely than ever, as it shimmered and gleamed fitfully in the half-shadows thrown by the shaded electric lamp that stood upon the table.

"She wore a plain white silk blouse, cut low in the

neck, that showed to perfection the delicate modelling of her throat, around which hung a thin gold chain carrying a small cameo. She gave a little cry of delight as Henri, the waiter, offered her the *filets de soles Mirabeau;* and, to be sure, the fish was well cooked and the dish very elegantly arranged.

"'You are too good to me, Maurice,' she murmured, glancing shyly at the man opposite her.

"'Nothing could be too good for you, Lucille,' replied the other, as he lifted me up and filled her glass with a hand that shook a little; and he gazed at her so longingly that had her eyes not been upon her plate, she might very easily have been more frightened than she was. For she *was* a little frightened and not altogther at ease, although she showed no outward sign of this. But I—he, he!—I peeped into her mind; and a quaint little chaos it was in, too. She had had doubts about accepting Maurice Krauss's invitation to dinner. It was, perhaps, not altogether wise to do so: a young girl has to be very careful: but then, after all, she was quite capable of looking after herself: she was not a child: she had been dancing now for a couple of years and she was not ignorant of the world. Then, Maurice Krauss was a very important person: he was a power in the land. It was said of Maurice Krauss . . . well, lots of things were said of Krauss—not all perhaps to his credit—but, then, every big man has enemies, and everybody talks scandal about everybody. Not that she supposed Maurice to be—well, to be any better than he should be: but she could take care of herself. Why, for her—an unknown dancer—to refuse an invitation to dinner with Maurice Krauss—was folly, pure folly. She knew dozens of girls—quite good girls—who would . . . well, who would have done all sorts of things to be noticed by Krauss. Indeed, her bosom friend, Madeleine Arengaud, was green with jealousy about it, and had said unmentionable things—the little cat. Besides, Maurice was really quite a dear: he had such delightful manners: of course, he was not young: but then,

he was a man of the world. So she had accepted his invitation and here she was; and Maurice had lived up to his reputation in the ordering of a dinner. She took up her glass and sipped a little of the Lafitte.

" 'What lovely wine! What is it?'

" 'It's Lafitte—1878.'

" 'Oh, Maurice!' and she drank a little more of the wine.

"Maurice Krauss murmured something in depreciation of the wine, of the dinner, of himself: two of which were untrue and none of which he believed; but common courtesy required it.

"He said something in praise of her work and Lucille flushed with pleasure: he said some more appropriate and agreeable things, and while he was doing so I took note not of what he was saying to Lucille, but of what he was thinking. He, he! two quite different things, I assure you, my dear sir.

" *His* mind was quite clear and orderly—compared to hers. He was wondering how long the little fool—God, she was pretty!—would hold out. She was very young—and might be difficult to manage. He did some hard thinking. How far should he go that night? Or should he leave it altogether—for another time? To be precipitate might be to lose all. She was a silly little fool: not like the other girls: but, then, all the more desirable. He could offer her something: a success she hardly dare dream of—for he was Maurice Krauss: and she thought she could dance, the little one. It should go some way with her. But he would have to be cautious: he was very certain about that: he would have to offer her the job at exactly the right time and in the right manner. For the moment, he had better wait; and watch: watch her very carefully. Surely the wine would aid him: he had chosen it with care and with an object. He would have preferred champagne: it has a medicinal quality, and a few glasses of the Widow might—he knew from experience that it often did—work wonders. But he had hesitated to order it: she might have taken fright at it:

it might, perhaps, have advertised his intention. So, after cogitation, he chose the Lafitte.

"She had drunk about half a glass of the wine, and leaning across the table, Krauss filled up her glass.

"Although the quantity of alcohol which she had drunk must have been very small, already those funny little bacilli were at work—he, he! She felt very much more at ease: she began to feel quite at home with Maurice Krauss: she met his glance firmly and without any drooping of the eyelids. She was very glad she had come; and she laughed silently to herself as she thought of the jealousy of the other girls. She sipped, contentedly, a little more of the Lafitte.

"She looked Maurice squarely in the face. There was no doubt that he was handsome: perhaps he was not young: but, then, she had no use for boys: in fact, he really was not old: she wondered how she had ever spoken of him as 'old Krauss.'

"She was ecstatic in her delight when the *faison à l'angoumoise* was brought up for inspection and approval, and when Maurice Krauss loaded her plate with tit-bits from the dish—the truffles and the chestnut stuffing—she laughingly put some of it back from her plate on to his and chided him for giving her too much of the best and denying himself, with so charming an air of mock displeasure and so graceful an assumption of intimacy, that Maurice Krauss very nearly lost his head then and there. But with an effort he pulled himself together: at all costs he must not be premature. He was a past master in the art of manners and he answered her mood of easy good-fellowship with much skill—though there was a fire alight inside him which it needed all his self-command to keep in check. No, he assured himself, the time had not yet come.

"He poured her out some more of the Lafitte.

"She had drunk the first glass of wine slowly and with circumspection. But she half emptied the second glass at one draught.

"Maurice was a dear: she was sure of that now. She

was almost in love with him; and when a little later she had emptied her glass, and Maurice Krauss had spoken in praise of the cameo which hung around her neck, she bent forward very readily for him to help her slip it over her head so that he might admire it closely. There was some little difficulty in getting that chain around and outside her hair and over her head, and the matter was complicated by the clumsiness of Krauss, whose hand became entangled with her hair. Also she made no attempt to help him herself, but leant a little to one side so that his hand that held the chain might brush against her neck. He, he! what sporting little beggars these bacilli are! . . . It was while she was peeling her peach that Krauss decided to talk of what he could do for her. Of how he had seen her dancing: of her cleverness: of how he wanted a *première danseuse* in his new ballet: of how she was the only person who could fill the bill. Would she do it? She stared round-eyed at Maurice Krauss.

"'Would she do it? Would she take it on? Why, he was mad to ask her: what girl would refuse such an offer! But did he really—really and truly think she could take on the job?' And while she was thus talking, her mind in amaze at such fortune, he leant forward and, taking me up, poured her out a little more Lafitte.

"'You're not doing justice to the wine,' he murmured; and, automatically, she picked up her glass and drank.

"'But, Maurice, Maurice, how good of you! It will be my great chance. How can I ever thank you? What can I do to show my gratitude?' and I, who was looking into her mind, saw that had it not been for the waiter she would have flung her arms around Krauss's neck and kissed him. Not only in thanks for his goodness, but that he might, in his turn, kiss her: and oh, she wanted so badly to be kissed by Maurice . . . What little devils these bacilli . . .'

"Oh, damn the bacilli!" growled Matthew Sumner.

"She had eaten her peach," continued the bottle, ignoring Sumner's interruption, "and I saw that Maurice

Krauss was going to hit the iron while it was hot—if I may use a crude and homely simile.

" 'Shall we have our coffee upstairs?' he asked. 'It's so crowded down here. We'll be by ourselves . . .'

" 'Oh, do let's,' cried Lucille, and she looked at Krauss with her wide-open, blue eyes in such a manner as to cause him to call hurriedly for the waiter in order to distract her attention from the light that was in his own eyes.

" 'We'll drink our coffee upstairs,' he said to Henri; and Henri, who had received instructions beforehand, understood perfectly.

" 'And bring the Lafitte with you,' added Krauss.

"I've always been glad for that—he, he! Glad that I wasn't left behind.

"Henri went upstairs first to show the way, carrying me with him. He set me down on a small table in the middle of the room: a table in the centre of which was a great bowl of roses: roses that Maurice Krauss had ordered that morning. It was a very pleasant little room. There was a fire burning in the grate, for it was still early spring; and on one side of the room there was a large sofa, with three or four cushions on it covered in parti-coloured silk. Lucille threw herself down on the sofa and Maurice placed the brightly-coloured cushions behind her and around her, till she looked as pretty a sight as you could wish to see, half buried in the cushions, with her gold hair standing out in relief against a huge cushion in black and green silk.

"Maurice Krauss poured her out another glass of wine. She drank it where she sat on the sofa, making eyes at Maurice over the rim of the glass. These little bacilli, sir, he, he! he, he! . . ."

The bottle choked a little, while Matthew Sumner glared indignantly at that aged reveller.

"He, he! he, he! Henri came back in a moment with the coffee and the Grand Marnier. He went out, closing the door very carefully behind him—oh, so very care-

fully. I am glad he didn't take me away—he, he!—although I was by that time quite empty.

"Lucille lay back among the cushions and sipped her liqueur: Maurice could not take his eyes off her. She gave Krauss the empty liqueur glass to put back on the table.

" 'Oh,' she said, 'oh, Maurice: you are good to me. Maurice; Maurice, won't you kiss me?'

"Maurice Krauss knelt beside her and placed his lips to hers.

" 'Do you think I can dance well enough, Maurice? Oh, Maurice, do you? I've got a pretty ankle, I know: and Elsie's ankles are like—faggots. Don't you think it is a pretty ankle, a pretty leg? Look!' And with one arm around Krauss's neck, she took hold of her skirt with the other, and . . . he, he! . . . throwing one leg up on to the sofa . . ."

But the bottle was unable to continue his reminiscences, for at this point in his story, Mr. Matthew Sumner shouted:—

"Take that, you lecherous old drunkard!" and swept the bottle off the table on to the paving-stones, where it broke in pieces with a crash.

The Widow Mesnôit came out of the café.

"Q'est-ce que c'est que ça?" she demanded.

"C'n'est rien," said Sumner, *"c'est moi. J'ai cassé une bouteille: ça fait deux sous, n'est-ce pas?"*

Mr. Matthew Sumner made his way back to his hotel in a very bad temper. It was still early in the evening and the streets were full of people, but Sumner elbowed his way through them, without any regard for the convenience of others, careless of the good manners of the common street. He was out of humour, for the time being, with his fellow-men.

He crossed the square, and disregarding some acquaintances sitting outside the Café Central, who called to him to join them, he turned into a side-street and in a few minutes reached the door of his hotel.

The old, white-headed hall porter half rose from his chair inside the door and murmured, *"Bon soir, M'sieu,"* but Sumner passed him by without so much as a nod.

He went into his room and closed the door with a bang that betrayed his state of mind.

It was a large, comfortable, old-fashioned room, with a big square brass bedstead, a massive wardrobe, and a heavy, flat, marble-topped wash-stand. There was a dressing-table in the window. The window was open, and the night wind blew in a fragrant smell from the azaleas and syringas that were in bloom in the garden below. Outside a cricket sang lustily.

Mr. Matthew Sumner grew into a better temper. He had thrown his coat into the armchair, as though he had a personal spite against that useful garment: he treated his waistcoat with more consideration, hanging it neatly on the arm of the chair. He bent down and unlaced his boots, when a voice just behind him said:—

"Good-evening."

Matthew Sumner turned round suddenly, but the room was empty.

"Who's that?" he cried angrily.

"Me."

"Who's me?"

"Why, the bed."

"So you can talk too, can you?" said Sumner, fiercely.

"Of course, I can: indeed, they say I'm rather a gossip."

"Oh, they do, do they?" groaned Sumner.

"Yes: but then most beds are incurable gossips: dreadful scandal-mongers, my dear sir. We have, perhaps—er—peculiar opportunities . . ."

"Shut up, can't you!" shouted Sumner, in the devil of a temper.

"I don't think you are at all polite. In fact, I think it very ill-mannered of you not to . . ."

"Well, I don't want to listen to you. For one thing, I want to go to sleep in a few minutes."

He kicked off his boots, and for a little while the bed

was silent. He had undone his collar and tie and was just about to slip off his shirt when the bed began again:—

"The night before last I had old Père Godoy's young wife here: I do not know who the young man was, but she called him Paul. He was a lad, he was. Why, when I tell you . . ."

"Will—you—be—quiet?" shouted Sumner, furiously.

"No, I will not," replied the bed, angrily. "I consider you, sir, to be a most ill-mannered person. I shall in no sense comply with your most unreasonable request. It is not often that I get the chance to tell the human beings who sleep on me a little truth about themselves, and I do not propose to deny myself that very harmless indulgence. It's quite absurd for you to pretend you want to go to sleep at once; you simply don't want to listen to me."

"That's perfectly true," replied Sumner, "and since there seems to be no way to stop your talking, I am going out for a walk: you can tell your stories to the wash-hand basin."

"But he's heard them all," groaned the bed, while Sumner began putting on his boots again with feverish haste.

Mr. Matthew Sumner flung himself out of the hotel in an even worse temper than he had flung himself into it. The white-haired porter stared after him.

"Il cherche la poule," he grumbled.

But Mr. Matthew Sumner strode through the streets at a great pace: across the square again and up the Rue Nationale until he came out on to the Peyrou.

That wide-open place was deserted at this hour. A pleasant breeze blew inland from the sea, and as Matthew Sumner snuffed it up into his nostrils, he began to feel a little less out of humour with all things. He sat down upon a stone bench beneath one of the trees and lit a cigarette. He smoked the cigarette and wondered what had happened to the world and when he might get to bed in peace. Presently he threw away the stump of the cigarette and was about to light his pipe when a voice said:—

"I wish you wouldn't throw cigarette ends about like

that. It's so untidy: old Gustave is supposed to sweep them up, but he never does."

"Who in the devil are you?" asked Sumner; for the voice came from somewhere almost, it might have been underneath him.

"I'm the seat you're sitting on," said the voice.

"Oh," said Sumner, weakly.

"I hate all that mess about the place," continued the bench. "Perhaps I'm old-fashioned. But still, I don't like it."

Mr. Matthew Sumner ground the cigarette end into the earth with his heel.

"Everything seems to be talking to me to-night," he said, plaintively.

"Well, sir, perhaps it's simply because you're able to hear what they say. Now there was a couple sitting on me this afternoon to whom I should like to have said something. As a matter of fact I talked to them for half-an-hour, only they couldn't hear me. I suppose I'm old-fashioned and romantic and all that: I got very hot about it."

Matthew Sumner rose.

"No, please don't go, I pray you, sir. It isn't very often that I find anybody so sympathetic as you are to talk to. The other benches here think I'm a silly old fool: an idealist: a sentimentalist: at least, that's what they call me, as though it were a disgrace to be a sentimentalist."

Matthew Sumner sat down again. He found it difficult to refuse the appeal made to him: he felt that the bench was a man—or a bench rather—after his own heart.

"Now this couple, for instance," continued the bench, in an apologetic tone, "they were lovers; at least, they were supposed to be lovers. They sat with their arms around one another and were very fond. Well, I don't object to *that*. I may be strait-laced—I *am* strait-laced . . ."

"Thank God some one is," ejaculated Matthew Sumner, fervently.

". . . and I have a kind heart for lovers. I like to have them sit on me and behave as such. It makes me feel young again: I always give them my blessing—'Be happy, young people: take joy in each other: multiply and replenish the earth'—but then, perhaps, as I am told, I am old-fashioned.'

"I think that is very kindly of you," broke in Sumner, "it is very sane."

"*They* say I'm sentimental," quavered the bench. "Well, these two sat upon me and made love to one another. One was Thérèse, the eldest daughter of Gravinaux, the vintuer. She was not pretty and she was thirty-five years old: I was delighted to think she had a beau. And a handsome beau too: young Jean Laubat."

"Yet you don't seem over-pleased about it?" suggested Matthew Sumner.

"No, I'm not. No: most emphatically, no. Unhappily, I can see into men's minds. A fatal gift, my dear sir, a Greek gift . . . one is, alas, too often disillusioned. Had it not been for this . . . this unhappy clairvoyance, I might have been cheerfully sentimental over those young people still.

"Thérèse ought to have been thinking of how deeply Jean loved her. She wasn't even thinking of how she loved him. As a matter of fact, she did not love him at all. She was simply congratulating herself that she had caught a man at last, and that she would no longer be an object of contempt and mockery to her sisters, who were all of them married. She was thinking that she might have done much better; but, then, she might have done worse: she might, so to speak, have not done anything at all. She leant heavily against Jean and squeezed his hand that lay in her lap and smiled languishingly upon him. But she didn't deceive me—I wish she had—and, as far as that goes, she didn't deceive him."

"And Jean?"

"Jean was not thinking about Thérèse: dear me, no. He was thinking about a matter of much more importance —her *dot*. He had seen her father that morning about it

—he had been tactful, of course—and old Gravinaux had been so overjoyed at getting Thérèse off his hands that he had been quite unduly generous in the matter, at least for him. Of course, Thérèse—to use a slang of which I thoroughly disapprove, but which is most expressive—was a wash-out: in every sense of that unpleasant word. But the *dot* was almost adequate; and then there was Susette. Susette was a considerable expense: he could hardly keep her much longer unless he could materially increase his income. Now Thérèse's *dot* would just do that comfortably. It was just what he needed. He became quite affectionate as he thought of Susette; and his arm around Thérèse's waist tightened and he drew her to him and kissed her lightly on the cheek. With his eyes shut—as they were at that moment—he could almost imagine . . ."

But the bench was talking into empty air. Mr. Matthew Sumner was already an hundred yards away.

He ran down the steps from the Peyrou till he reached the white road below. He crossed the empty square, walking hurriedly, but without any purpose; away, simply away; away into Nowhere.

As he stepped on to the straight, white, dusty road that leads to Gignac a dog ran up to him.

It was but a brown, mongrel dog, with one ear bitten into ribbons and with the mange. But Matthew Sumner felt very friendless and alone in the world and his heart was heavy within him.

The dog danced around him in a most friendly fashion. He held out his hand. The dog licked it.

"*Dis donc!*" The dog gave a little bark.

"Can't you talk like the other things?" said Sumner.

"Bow-wow," barked the dog, "bow-wow, bow-wow."

"Thank God for that!" cried Sumner, fervently.

So Matthew Sumner walked on through the starlit night along the straight white road to Nowhere at a great pace, heedless of all that the trees and the gate-posts and the milestones whispered to him as he passed, companioned by a mongrel hound with the mange, which, by the Grace of God, could not talk.

CHAPTER XV: THE COMEDY IN SANTA MARIA À CITRELLA

MATTHEW SUMNER lay for a long time afloat upon the green water, gazing up into the blue sky. At length he turned over on his side and began to swim towards the rocks. He swam slowly and lazily, for time was of no moment to him, and to hurry in doing anything in the island of Capri is an offence in so beautiful and peaceful a place. He reached the rock ledge at last, and, pulling himself up on it out of the limpid water—a sea so clear that every filament of seaweed and every pebble and the minutest shell were to be seen five fathoms deep—he lay a-sprawl upon the rock in the hot sunshine.

He lay there for some time, until he was very nearly dried in the sunshine, and then, rising slowly to his feet, made his way carefully over the round rocks to where he had left his clothes at the base of the cliff.

A minute later he stood staring stupidly down at the pile of clothes on the rocks. His surprise and his confusion of mind were not unnatural, for half-an-hour earlier he had left in this place a pair of grey flannel trousers, a cotton shirt, a Panama and a pair of canvas shoes; and instead of these he was now staring at a long shapeless garment of some coarse dark material quite unlike any clothes which he was used to wear.

He felt certain that it was here that he had left his clothes before going down to bathe: yet perhaps he was mistaken as to the exact spot. He walked along the foot of the cliff in one direction for several hundred yards, searching every square foot of rock with the greatest care. He returned and walked as far in the other direc-

tion. But all his search was in vain; and although he spent the best part of an hour hunting for his clothes, peering into every cleft and behind every rock and examining the most unlikely places, he failed to find so much as a sock or a handkerchief.

He stood gazing moodily down upon the rough garment at his feet. It was not his and it looked none too clean. But he could hardly walk back two miles to his hotel in Capri naked. He made up his mind to put on what he had found.

He picked it up. It was of a coarse stuff: a long tunic of a rude cut, together with a large and clumsy hood, and around the middle there was a rough thick cord. It was, in fact, a habit of the kind worn by friars of the Order of St. Francis.

He slipped it on and tied the cord at the waist. Where the habit had lain were a pair of wooden sandals and a black skull-cap. He sat down on a boulder and, after some difficulty, for he was not used to this kind of footwear, put on the sandals. He placed the skull-cap on his head, for the sun was hot. He was a little surprised to find how well it fitted. He began to make his way back along the shore to the place where the cliff-path began.

At first his mind was altogether filled with anger at the loss of his own clothes. Fortunately, there was little of much value in his pockets: but enough to cause him annoyance and some little inconvenience. He speculated on the thief: he suspected some renegade monk: or a beggar, perhaps, masquerading as a hermit and a holy man; and he turned over in his mind means by which steps could be taken to discover the thief and recover his lost property.

But as he climbed the narrow and winding path which leads from the baths of Tiberius, beyond which he had bathed, to the road from the town to the Marina Grande, his mind seemed slowly to change.

His indignation at the theft and his disgust at having to wear an old and unclean garment, abandoned as he sup-

posed by a beggar, began slowly to grow fainter, until, by the time he had reached the place where the path left the cliff's edge and ran between the walls of the orange orchards, he had ceased altogether to be angry at the theft or to think at all about the inconvenience to which he was put or to notice any longer that the rough cloth chafed his bare skin and that the sandals were uncomfortable and that it was difficult to walk in them. With each step he took, he became more accustomed to the garb which he wore: it no longer seemed *bizarre* and strange to him. He had, to begin with, feared the ridicule of being seen so garbed; but now it seemed to him that he had always worn such clothes; and putting his hand, quite mechanically, into a large pocket or pouch in his robe, he took out a rosary of wooden beads without even noticing that he had done so. Behind the Villa Linarina, where the narrow path branches, one branch leading towards the high road and the other upwards to the slopes of Monte Solaro, there is a small shrine let into the wall which flanks the orange grove to the left of the path. In a niche in the wall, a Madonna some two feet in height, crudely fashioned in plaster and gaudily painted, listens to the prayers of the poor who pass by and who are devout enough to stay for a moment upon their worldly errands to beg her intercession for their sins.

Mr. Matthew Sumner was a pagan, and was used to say so: if not precisely with pride, at least with some sort of self-complacency in the confession. Nevertheless, he stopped before the shrine very devoutly. He crossed himself, and, standing there with bowed head, he fingered his beads, and muttered a prayer or two in Latin for his soul's welfare and for that of all sinners on this earth, and, above all, that the Mother of God might intercede with her Son for those souls now suffering in Purgatory.

Matthew Sumner passed on. But not by the left-hand path, which led to the high road and to the town of Capri: instead, he turned sharply to his right hand and up the steep path that wound through the ilex-covered slopes to-

wards Monte Solaro, which towered two thousand feet above him into the blue sky.

"'*Aufer a nobis,*'" he murmured, as he walked, with bowed head, "'*aufer a nobis, quæsumus Domine, iniquitates nostras: ut ad sancta sanctorum puris mereamur mentibus introire.*'"

The narrow path wound up steeply among the groves of orange-trees and lemon-trees, bounded on either side by low rough walls of undressed stones. The path itself, which in winter time was a water-course, was strewn with pebbles which bruised his unprotected feet as he walked. But he paid no heed to this, nor to the yellow and golden fruit that hung upon the trees around him, as he might at another time have done: nor at all whither he was going.

He looked neither to his right hand nor to his left hand: but at the ground before him, which he did not see. His lips moved from time to time as he fingered the beads of his rosary.

Thus Mr. Matthew Sumner followed the narrow and winding path up the steep slopes from the shore until he reached the bottom of the many stone steps that lead to Anacapri and the high plateau on which it stands.

He began to climb the rough, deep steps slowly and painfully. How many there are of them and how many years ago they were cut out of the rock are both uneasy to compute. Some say the Phœnicians made these steps when the world was yet young, but at least now they are greatly worn and not easy to climb, more particularly in sandals of wood and without a staff to aid one in the attempt.

At the top of the first flight of steps Matthew Sumner stood still for a moment to recover his breath. A young girl, with a face as brown as a berry and bare arms and legs, passed him, carrying a round basket filled with lemons on her head. Sumner had been gazing out over the blue sea as he stood there waiting, but as she passed he dropped his eyes to the ground.

"Ne nos inducas in tentationem," he muttered into his beard. He did not look up until the girl had passed out of his sight. He began to climb again.

Half-way up that steep and laborious ascent there is a small platform jutting out from the cliff face and fenced in with a low stone bastion to prevent the unwary or travellers at night from falling over and on to the rocks many hundreds of feet below. Matthew Sumner sat down upon this parapet for some minutes, for the long climb had wearied him. A peasant, carrying a great bundle of cut ilex boughs on his back, came down the stairway. As he came opposite Matthew Sumner he dropped his burden and, falling on to one knee, asked for his blessing. And although Sumner knew but little Italian, and certainly not the patois which the peasant spoke, he nevertheless seemed to understand, for he raised his hand above the peasant's head, murmuring:—

"Dominus tecum, mi fili," and the peasant again shouldered his load and went on down the steps with a lighter heart. A minute later Matthew Sumner rose, and once more began to climb.

At last, after an hour's toil, he stood at the top of that great stairway. Immediately beneath, a mere blotch of colour upon the blue water, gleamed the ruins of the baths of Tiberius: to his right, the white ribbon of the road to Capri curled away in successive loops, and further away and below, the toy harbour of the Marina Grande, with its toy houses and its pigmy boats, lay spread out to the sight in the bright sunshine.

Far away across the blue sea a streak of grey and silver marked the mainland, and a little to the right lay Vesuvius, a larger and darker mass, capped with a cloud. Matthew Sumner gazed with sombre eyes over the great bay for nearly a minute, and then, turning abruptly, struck inland towards Anacapri. The path that he followed was, perhaps, one of the most beautiful in the island: where all ways and places are beautiful. On the left are villas of the purest white stucco, half buried in roses, and to the

right orange orchards, sloping away towards the west, and above and beyond them the sea. The villas here are of the largest and loveliest in the island: flights of marble steps lead up to them from the public way, through gardens ablaze with all manner of flowers. But Sumner passed all these without heeding them and with but one glance at the largest and loveliest, which was built all of marble, muttering as he did so:—

"Facilius est camelum per foramen acus transire, quam divitem intrare in regnum cælorum."

He did not follow the road into the town of Anacapri. He turned suddenly, a little way past the villas, into the path—it is hardly more than a sheep-track—which leads to Monte Cappello and Monte Solaro and to the tilled acres that lie in the saddle of the Crocella. The track is a rough one and not too easy to follow, but though Matthew Sumner had not before walked in it, yet he never hesitated where the track divided, nor did he even so much as raise his head to look about him and verify by the lie of the land the direction in which he was going.

He reached the Crocella and stood a moment in prayer before the shrine where the path divides. He did not, however, turn into the steep track that leads up to the summit of Monte Solaro, but continued in the lower path which leads to the little church of Santa Maria à Citrella. Ten minutes later he stood before the porch of the church. He did not at once enter, but climbing on to the high ridge to the right of the chapel, stood there very still, gazing out over the sea. The sun had by now sunk low upon the waters and the sea shone like a sheet of gold, gradually turning to silver on the horizon. No sail or ship, no rock, nor any island marred that gleaming mirror, and the coast of Africa lay out of human sight beyond the round rim of the world. At his left hand and so many thousand feet below him the crooked town of Capri gleamed whitely among the green and silver of vine and olive and the red of the earth; and here and there cypress and ilex stood out blackly against white walls and the

green of grass and all the colors of a thousand flowers. A great stillness hung upon the world: for in this high and lonely place no echo of the noisy affairs of men fell upon the ear. The beasts of the field fed upon the lower slopes and even the birds of the air flew in widening circles about the cliffs below. Here Matthew Sumner stood in a great silence and alone, save for a green lizard asleep upon a stone and the minute insects within the petals of a flower and among the leaves of herbs.

He stood with his hands clasped behind him, staring out over the sea. During his long climb up to this mountain hermitage, his heart had been heavy and pitiful for the sins of men, who in their blindness bowed down to strange gods, and who sought not the mercy and forgiveness of Him who hung upon the Cross between two malefactors for the expiation of their sins; and who left His tabernacles deserted and who made His gardens of earth a wilderness and a place of desolation and despair. But here, so high that, as it were, all the world lay spread out at his feet: far away from the madness of men, who to-day are and to-morrow are not: standing, almost, with his head in Heaven and his feet but touching the highest pinnacle of Earth: a balm was laid upon the wounds of his spirit and peace entered into his soul.

He fell upon his knees on the bare rock and repeated the prayer of the founder of his order:—

"'*Deus, qui Ecclesiam tuam, beati Francisci meritis fœtu novæ prolis amplificas: tribue nobis, ex ejus imitatione terrena despicere, et cœlestium donorum semper participatione gaudere. Per Christum Dominum nostrum.*'"

For many minutes he knelt there, an unmoving figure, hewn (it might have been imagined) out of the enduring rock upon which he knelt. A grey and green lizard slipped out from underneath a sheltering stone where it had taken refuge a little while before, so still and silent was the worshipper: so safe the world seem once again.

At last Matthew Sumner rose to his feet and walked slowly into the church.

The hermitage of Santa Maria à Citrella has no great architectural beauty to recommend it to the æsthetic nor any history to intrigue the traveller. The little church is but some hundred years old, and the last hermit who lived there to escape the snares of the world and to praise God in solitude and poverty has been long dead. The building is crumbling into decay; and the Mass is said there only now and again: for the little church is far away even from the nearest farm and there are but few worshippers.

The church was empty. There was an air of neglect about the whole building. A small pile of broken bricks and crumbled mortar lay in the middle of the aisle. The few chairs were covered in dust and more than one lacked a leg or a back. There were flowers in a cracked bowl before the altar; but they had been dead for some days. The plain glass in the windows was broken in more than one place. The candles guttered in the heat. Spiders spun their webs, unhindered, everywhere. Matthew Sumner had dipped his finger into the small stone basin inside the doorway but no water cooled his finger, for the holy water in the stoup had already dried up.

Sumner fell on his knees before the altar and remained there for some while in prayer. He then rose and turned towards the wooden confessional that stood against the south wall. Both the doors of the confessional were closed. Matthew Sumner opened the door on the priest's side and went in. He closed the door behind him and sat down with his ear towards the grating in the partition that divided the box. It is not possible to explain why Matthew Sumner should go into an empty confessional box in the deserted chapel of an abandoned hermitage as he thus did. By some magic metamorphosis he was, it is true, no longer Matthew Sumner, but a priest of the Order of St. Francis. But it is not any easier to explain why a Franciscan friar should do this.

But Pagan or Christian, celibate before God or celibate before man: Hedonist or Altruist: Stoic or Epicurean:

Catholic or Antinomian: one out of many or one of many; all are pawns moved hither and thither about the chess-board of the world by players whose names we do not know, whose faces we cannot see and whose intention we may not discover. We may destroy knights: we may take castles: we may remove bishops from their sees: we may send queens to the guillotine and dethrone kings: we may pass from square to square and become kings in turn at the will and skill of the Unknown Players. But kings and queens, knights and nobles, pope or pawn, all alike are moved hither and thither, to become little or to become great, and, sooner or later, willy-nilly, to be swept from the board into that chess-box which is called the grave. All mortal men—and Mr. Matthew Sumner not least among them—are but witnesses to that impossible probability which is more probable than any possible improbability: but dupes of Fate, obedient to an ununderstandable decree. It is enough to record the bare fact that Mr. Matthew Sumner in the guise of a priest of God, entered into the confessional box, in the deserted hermitage church of Santa Maria à Citrella on the slopes of Monte Solaro in the island of Capri about the hour of the going down of the sun.

It was very dark and still in the narrow cell of the confessional: for a long time Matthew Sumner sat there in that darkness and in that dead silence. But at last a faint sound came from the other half of the box: so small a noise that it was not distinguishable at first as a voice at all. It could be heard but as a murmur, very slight and indistinct and broken, as of the tide upon shingle or as a wind among the aspens or as a little water bubbling over the pebbles in a brook.

But slowly the murmur grew more distinct: here and there a word could be caught; and a little later one or two words together and halves of sentences.

The voice was feeble and uncertain: pitiful and querulous: the voice of a very old man, rising and falling in

tone: beginning sentences which it did not finish: ending sentences which had not begun; or stringing words together that had no beginning and no end. Yet though the voice was that of a dotard—often unintelligible and at times almost inaudible—still Matthew Sumner felt a strange thrill through his being as he sat there in the dark, listening: an odd feeling for which he could not account, but which made him listen to what was being mumbled through the grating as though his soul's welfare was dependent on his hearing the confession of this aged penitent.

The voice grew a little stronger.

"In the beginning . . . it was well . . . I meant well . . . the beginning . . . in the beginning was the Word . . . the beginning . . . I meant well: I did well . . . not as it is now, but soon, very soon . . . I did not mean . . . that was so . . . I hoped; and it was for that . . . in the beginning, I had need . . . and it was well—then. So . . . it was . . . they . . . and not so well . . . but . . ."

The voice trailed away into an indistinct muttering, to break again, a minute later, into speech, stronger and more articulate than heretofore:—

"In the beginning the Word was with God: the Word was God. I meant well . . . it was so that . . . they . . . that . . . so . . ."

Again the voice died away into a murmur. But presently it grew again:—

"Beautiful cities: beautiful, foolish cities: and around and about them fertile lands . . . and corn and wine . . . and now but ruins buried beneath the desert sand . . . and others . . . beneath the seas . . . or buried in ashes . . . with their temples and their gods: their children and their concubines; and all their great wealth and their wisdom and their folly. Forgotten . . . and again forgotten . . . there was need for this . . . for more than this; and there was more than this . . . I meant well . . . and again I tried . . . and again there was failure . . .

and there were again signs out of Heaven, and the skies were darkened and the earth shook . . . and they were forgotten as though they had not been . . . but one here and one there . . . in whom the little flame that I had lighted still burnt, though but a flicker . . . these I saved that I might begin—again . . . and again . . . I meant well."

The voice ceased.

There was a deep silence for a little while, and Matthew Sumner sat there in the darkness as still as though he had been turned into stone, waiting for the unknown to speak again.

"It was all beautiful," began the voice once more, still stronger in tone. "It was all well ordered and I was glad. The days and hours and the appointed seasons. And the sun by day and the moon and the stars by night and the sea and the hills and all the gardens of the world. And I meant well: man in the pride of his strength: woman in the pride of her beauty . . . and so many years have been recorded and forgotten: so many peoples have passed away: so many cities have been buried: so many times have so many acres been watered with tears and with blood. And I have begun again . . . I meant well . . . and I am weary . . ." The voice was silent for a moment: then it continued:—

"From time to time the flame that I have lighted burns up a little and there is light in the darkness before it flickers and goes out. Always and at once the flame shakes unsteadily and dies. Some have been strong: a few have prevailed for a time. But in spite of all these guardians of the sacred flame: prophets of the Word which is with God: the Word that is God: still man made of man what man is. A doer of evil: an eater of filth: liar in his heart: and in night-time darkness but a frightened child. An oppressor of the weak: an adulterer: a false witness: a perjurer; and a coward. The fires that I lighted in the darkness have been neglected and they have died; and as man was, so man remains, hating his life, cursing his Maker

and afraid of Death. I have failed . . . and yet . . . man is made . . . is more . . ."

The voice died away for a moment, but it grew stronger again almost immediately.

"Man is more than man . . . for he is made in the image of God; and he is born to much evil or to much good, and always he is born to suffer . . . and to die. Yet, in the beginning, he was not made to be what he has become: but that he might dwell for ever in the garden of the world: happy in all things, fearing nothing and a witness to the goodness of God who made him and all things alive.

"It had to be that he was less than God that he might be more than God . . . that he might overcome evil, so that evil at last would die . . . and for this purpose he was created that he might win for God that which God Himself was made unable to win: for to be all-powerful is to be all-powerless and he who cannot be vanquished, cannot conquer. So God made man in order that he whom evil could destroy might at last and unaided destroy evil. But . . . though many have died that the truth might live . . . yet the years bring no hope with them . . . the lamp that is lighted is put out . . . is again lighted, and again put out: all is but vanity and a vexation of spirit. I am weary of failure . . . for man who was born to live but lives to die . . . in sorrow and in pain and in despair—like any winter fly upon a window-pane. Man has not conquered evil . . . evil has conquered man.

Again and for a while there was silence and Matthew Sumner, with his ear against the grating in the partition of the confessional, waited, frozen into immobility, hardly daring to breathe.

"I have laboured unceasingly. I have raised up peoples and given unto them the Word through the mouths of my prophets. I have led them out of bondage that they might have dominion over the earth and become great and prevail. But in time—in so short a time as is but

a division of a second in the cycles of Eternity—they have forgotten the Word, and the strong have become weak and the seeing have become blind and out of good has grown evil; and the temples have been deserted and the witnesses have been stoned and their dominion has passed away. . . . Wars and pestilence and famine—and again wars and plagues and desolation. The soul of man has cried out against me for all the evil on the earth and the torment and the suffering . . . and the army of martyrs have died . . . and have died in vain . . . until at last I . . . even I . . . the Uncreated . . . became sorrowful and full of pity . . . for always I had meant well . . . that man, whom I loved, should conquer the evil that I hated . . . and that in the end night should become day and darkness light . . . and I wept for the suffering of the soul of man . . . I, the Merciful, the Compassionate . . . until, at last, when a thousand peoples had come and gone; and the waters had risen again and had again fallen back into the basins of the sea; and a thousand nations had been sold into slavery and a thousand cities had been destroyed . . . and all the prophets had been slain . . . and I had grown pitiful, as I have now grown weary and full of despair . . . I made the great sacrifice that I might receive the forgiveness of man . . ."

The voice stopped for a moment: a voice so full of sadness that the heart of the hearer was almost broken within him as he listened.

". . . that I might be forgiven for the sin that I had committed when I made man as God is and gave him the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil . . . so that he might conquer . . . and in expiation for the sin of that creation, I sent my only-begotten Son, that He might become man and suffer and that He might die . . . and . . . even in this . . . I have failed . . ."

The voice ceased: and there was a silence as absolute as though the world had ceased to turn upon its axis and Earth was dead.

"Who are you?" said Matthew Sumner at last, in a

whisper so low that the words which he framed with his lips were hardly to be heard even in that vast stillness.

"I am Alpha and Omega," answered the voice, which was no longer the voice of a dotard, no longer the tones of a penitent speaking through the small grating in a box, but a voice that echoed throughout all the earth, until the mountains shook and the seas piled themselves upon one another and all the cities of the world were razed to the ground," "I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END."

Matthew Sumner rose suddenly to his feet, while that great voice was still ringing in his ears, and flinging open the door of the confessional box, rushed wildly out through the church and into the sunshine outside.

But he did not wait on the slopes of Monte Solaro to admire the sunset upon the sea. The Voice still seemed to echo in his ears and a horror too great to be borne was his companion. He ran blindly on down the path by which he had come: heedless of the rough rock and steep and slippery places: only wishful to run away as swiftly as was possible from the little church of Santa Maria à Citrella.

How he ran as far as he did without falling is a matter for some wonder, but a little way out of Anacapri, where the path is very rocky and precipitous, he slipped and fell forward, striking his head against a rock. It was, perhaps, a merciful accident.

He was found a little later by a peasant and was taken to Anacapri.

The apothecary who bound up his head was unable to understand what he said when he became conscious. It is true that the leech knew no English: but had he done so, he would still have been at a loss to make anything of Matthew Sumner's words.

BOOK THREE: TESTIMONY

CHAPTER XVI: THE SECOND CONGREGATION

FOUR men sat at a round table in a very pleasantly-decorated room in the Hôtel Rítz in London. They were Mr. Michael O'Donoghue, Mr. Geoffrey Moxon, Mr. Peter Connington and Mr. Matthew Sumner. O'Donoghue was host, and his three friends were enjoying a dinner that was both very well ordered and most excellently cooked. They had begun with caviare: a caviare that was real caviare and not an approximation thereunto: a caviare which had been imported from Archangel, in despite of the distress of that unhappy part of the world, at great trouble and expense.

The soup was *bortsch*. The *sole régence* was exquisitely made, and the *entrée* which followed was a speciality of the head chef, made actually with his own hand, and only for royal, or, at least, ducal diners, or those whose wealth was such as to place them upon an equality with these in this democratic age.

There was a wild duck, accompanied by a salad of grape fruit and water-melon and a sauce, the composition of which was a secret jealously guarded by the composer.

The ice was a triumph of the sculptor's art. Indeed it was not altogether the work of the kitchen staff of the hotel, for Mr. Michael O'Donoghue had had the mould made by a sculptor whose name was known to many and whose work was nearly always to be seen at one or another of the London galleries.

The ice was cast into the shape of a sphinx. The ice-cream in which the figure was moulded was coloured a dead black by some ingenious infusion, and it rested upon a huge block of ice about two feet in depth, two feet long and a foot broad, which was wheeled into the room upon

a small trolley and lifted into position in the middle of the round table by the united strength of three waiters.

The sphinx crouched there upon its ice pedestal smiling —as the sphinx has always smiled—upon the diners. The head of the sphinx was really wonderfully chiselled, and the features had been perfectly reproduced from the mould, for it had been arranged in the casting of the ice that the head should be submitted to an intense degree of cold, so that it stood there as though it had been hewn out of the solid basalt: only the body was allowed to be at a lower temperature and in a condition to be cut and eaten.

"Behold my mascot," O'Donoghue had cried, when the ice was placed upon the table, "the bringer of all my good fortune."

But the other three gazed at it with disfavour, and Matthew Sumner half rose from his chair, muttering something that was unintelligible, and then sat down again. The waiter carved portions of the ice from the flank of the beast, and handed it around to O'Donoghue and his guests. But Mr. Matthew Sumner would eat none of it: he emptied his glass of Clicquot at a draught and made no attempt to hinder the waiter when he filled it again to the brim.

Peaches, nectarines and a pineapple, together with some crystallized fruits and bonbons, were placed upon the table after the *bombe Sphinx* had been taken away. Up to now O'Donoghue had done nearly all the talking: Moxon and Connington had said little and Matthew Sumner had hardly spoken at all. Even the Widow had failed to make these other three talk or to lighten the gloom which shadowed their faces. Presently the fruits were removed and coffee and cigars were put upon the table, and with them a small squat flask, very dingy to look at, which was carried in by the wine waiter with much ceremony.

The flask as opened with the greatest care.

"This, gentlemen," said O'Donoghue, "is a Napoleon brandy of 1800: there are, I believe, five bottles left in the world of this wonderful brandy. Two of them are

in Paris, one is in Monte Carlo, one is in Madrid and one —is here. I trust you will enjoy it: for you are unlikely to have the chance of drinking any of it again."

The four glases were filled, and, at a sign from O'Donoghue, the waiters withdrew, closing the door of the room behind them as they went out.

O'Donoghue stood up, and, raising his glass, said:—

"My friends—a toast. The Sphinx: the source of all our good fortune."

O'Donoghue put his glass to his lips, murmuring "The Sphinx": at the same time three other glasses were put down upon the table.

"You are not drinking my toast," complained O'Donoghue.

There was an awkward silence, which was at last broken by Geoffrey Moxon.

"Perhaps there is a reason for it: at any rate, let us drink to our good friend and host, Michael O'Donoghue."

The toast was drunk with fervour.

"I thank you, my friends," said O'Donoghue, "it is really kind of you. But I could have wished you had drunk also to the Sphinx—bless her. But if you don't want to, I won't press it . . . and I am more glad than I can say to have you as my guests here to-night. For not only is it always pleasant to see one's old friends at one's dinner-table, but, over and above that, to-night is an occasion to be remembered. The last time that we four met together things were very different with all of us. "To begin with myself, I could not have given you a dinner then such as I have happily been able to do to-night. I was then poor—miserably poor. You, Geoffrey, were but a love-sick poet: Peter was painting pot-boilers in an attic in Chiswick in order to live, and our one and only Sumner was . . . well, what he always was. We were all of us unhappy . . . until at length, at the end of night and having drink taken, we all followed Geoffrey (who was more drunk than any of us) down to the Thames Embankment and asked the Sphinx for gifts. The memory

of that night is, I confess, a little hazy . . . but there seems to have been something in the business after all. At least . . . but I do not want to talk of myself first. It is now two years since that last meeting, and I have asked you, my friends, to meet together to-night, in order that you may recount the fortune that has befallen you; and that we may make merry together in the delight of the gifts that the gods have granted us.

"Geoffrey, you were the first to ask on that memorable night: therefore you shall be the first to answer. You asked, if I remember rightly, for love. Come—tell us all about her . . . is she so very beautiful?"

Geoffrey Moxon leant back in his chair with his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets and stared moodily at the little cobwebby bottle in the middle of the table.

"She is very beautiful."

"Ha, ha! I thought so—you dog: I knew she would be."

"She is Helen."

"Is this the face that launched a thousand ships? And burned the topless towers of Ilium?" murmured O'Donoghue, "and does she love you, my boy?"

"She does."

"Lucky fellow: happy man—though I can't say you look it. You look more as if she had just bolted with your best friend."

"She hasn't," said Moxon, shortly.

"Dear boy, I didn't say she had: I simply said that if she had you couldn't look more miserable."

"I couldn't be more miserable," groaned Geoffrey Moxon.

"What!" shouted O'Donoghue, "do you love somebody else: or are you eaten up with jealousy, or what is it?"

"Oh, can't you see that that damned Sphinx has cheated us? That we've been played with—like a cat plays with a mouse before she kills it. Look at Peter there! Look at Sumner! Do they look happy? God knows I was miserable enough that night when we got tight and let

ourselves in for this: but I am ten times more miserable now."

"But," muttered Matthew Sumner, "if you love and if you are loved . . . you asked for that . . . you must be happy?"

"Don't you see," wailed Moxon, "that we've been done in? The Sphinx—damn her!—took us at our word. I asked that I might love the most beautiful and be loved by the most beautiful. And she is Helen! She is the most beautiful woman in the world—no less than that and no more than that—you understand? *no more than that;* and I love her, God help me, and she loves me . . ."

"It is an old trick: oh, such an old trick: so old a trick that even I, a poet, might have seen through it. It's in Homer. Do you think Paris was any happier when Helen was his?"

Geoffrey Moxon picked up his glass and emptied it at a gulp. A slight tinge of colour crept into his cheeks.

"I asked for love. Do you know what love is? It is self-immolation. Not the mere satisfying of carnal desires: not the vulgar joy in possession: but the complete surrender to the will of another: the translation of one into two, so that one is two and two is one: a duality that is unity: the utter sublimation of the Ego, so that it returns to God who made it—and *I am* becomes *we are.*"

"Yes, but . . ." began O'Donoghue.

"Observe," continued Geoffrey Moxon, ignoring the interruption and speaking with a feverish impatience, "that we were taken—or at least, I was taken—strictly at my word. I asked for the love of the most beautiful: and most beautiful she is: she is nothing more: she has the mind of a vegetable marrow—the imagination of a cabbage . . . and I love her. God forgive me, I love her! I would die for her, happily, to-morrow. But I do worse: I live for her; that my ways may be her ways and my thoughts her thoughts . . .

"And I am a poet: I was once a poet. I created things:

I stood with God and looked upon what I had made and saw that it was good, and I was happy. Once."

"But if she loves you," broke in Sumner, in a hesitating voice, "she will surely try to—er—to understand you: to . . . er . . not allow you to . . . er . . . give up so much . . ."

"You don't seem to understand," broke in Moxon, contemptuously. "I tell you she has the mind of a cabbage. The people who write letters in the *Daily Mail,* if such people really exist, are intellectuals compared to her. Her favourite novelists are people I've never even heard of, and she regards the reading of a novel by Ethel M. Dell as an intellectual accomplishment. She knows the name of every actor on the stage and forgets the name of any play three minutes after she has left the theatre. I doubt if she has ever read any poetry at all: if she has it is either by Ella Wheeler Wilcox or Felicia Hemans; and her conversation is the most painful I have ever listened to in my life. She reads the headlines in the paper and forgets what they are about by the time she has finished her breakfast, and her views on current affairs are, I imagine, considerably vaguer than those of the average scullery-maid. Yet I love her. To talk like this about her fills me with horror: it is as if I were throwing stones at God: it is blasphemy. I hate and loathe myself for it. But I cannot be blind to these facts. I dreamed love was happiness: it is hell. Without her I am nothing: for I love her; and with her I am less than nothing. I can no longer create—imagine—think. I am torn asunder; for poetry was a part of me, was me: and the love of words was inborn in me.

"There was once a time when I had that which was a refuge from all untoward things; in which, however, ill was my humour or however hostile the world, I could still find happiness and an enduring peace. I could work. That I can do no longer: but my temperament still remains the same. What I can no longer do, I would still attempt, and my heart is bitter with the knowledge of

failure and defeat. The love that I have gained has not paid me for the love that I have lost: for I have lost my self-respect: I am not only no longer a poet: I am no longer a man.

"It has been said that there is no greater sorrow than the knowledge of having failed in a high endeavour. That sorrow is already mine. But there is a deeper pain than that with which to rack the soul of man. It is to love when you can neither respect, understand nor even pity. It is the last torment that man's spirit may suffer before it is loosed from its bodily prison."

Geoffrey Moxon leaned forward with his elbows on the table and buried his face in his hands. The other three said nothing. Presently he raised his head, and his face was drawn as one in physical pain and his eyes were full of tears.

"I was once young," he said, almost in a whisper, so that it was hardly heard by those around the table, "and youth is a braggart: a lover of large words; and I, too, once dwelt in Parnassus. I was one of a brave company of singers and my Muse was my mistress:—

" 'She kissed me on the mouth, in that one kiss laying
A flame in my heart that put all fears to rout,
Which, by God's grace (to use old Latimer's gallant saying),
Shall never be put out.'

"Vain boast: for my lady Muse cannot leave the slopes of the holy hill or dwell away from the waters of Helicon and she will brook no rival.

"Old Kit—who was still faithful to death—sang more truly, perhaps, than he knew:—

" 'Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again . . .'

"But Helen has not made me immortal with a kiss: she has made me mortal—poor mortal man; and like Esau,

I have sold my birthright: I have sold my birthright for Helen's kiss, and God has forsaken me."

Again there was silence. For each of the others found it difficult to say anything that might console. It was Peter Connington who spoke at last.

"I told you you would make a mess of it, when you were so damned sentimental."

"Which you, of course," answered Moxon, bitterly, "were not. But judging by your face your gift hasn't brought much more happiness than mine. I have seen happier mugs than yours in a penitentiary."

"Come," said O'Donoghue, bluffly, "after all, Peter is now a power in the land. Everybody's talking about him, and if he ever sells one of his daubs for less than a cool thousand it's his own silly fault. Not that I pretend to understand them: I know nothing about high art: as for me, give me Blair Leighton or Leader or something a man can understand: something that is, at least, pretty to look at. But that's neither here nor there. All the critics and high-brows are dotty about Peter. He's *it*. He looks just now, I grant you, like the morning after the night before—by Jove, that's not a bad title for one of your beastly pictures, Peter—but if you sit up and talk a lot of damned nonsense about being unhappy . . . well, all I can say is, I shan't believe you. Anyway, have some more brandy—hair of the dog that bit you, you know—and tell us all about it, if you must."

Peter Connington stared offensively across the table at O'Donoghue.

"I have small patience with fools," he began, "and I seem to be dining to-night in the company of fools: with two fools at any rate. Sumner, at least, has had the sense to keep his mouth shut. You, O'Donoghue, seem to think that since I make as much money as I want—more money than I want—that I must therefore be happy . . ."

"Dear boy, of course . . ." broke in O'Donoghue.

"Humph, I see. Well, it doesn't work with me, I'm afraid. Geoffrey, who snivelled sentiment about what he

called love that night at Cleopatra's Needle, now comes here and snivels even more sentimentally about his blasted art. Because he's lucky enough to be loved by his wife it seems he can't write any more of his beastly poems . . . Well, all I can say is, he must be a bloody bad poet . . ."

"Look here," interrupted Geoffrey Moxon, angrily, "it's all very well to talk like that. A lot you know about poetry, good or bad; and as for being sentimental—well, what I can remember of your peroration that night to the Sphinx, it was the sloppiest thing . . ."

"Well, like you, I was drunk. I suppose it *was* pretty bad. And you've said at least one true thing to-night, when you spoke of the Sphinx taking us strictly at our word. *I* asked to be able to paint the 'unmeasured sorrow in the heart of man' or words to that effect. How do you think I could paint sorrow without suffering myself? One of you poet fellows—Bridges, wasn't it?—said:—

> "'For howsoe'er man hug his care
> The best of his art is gay.'

I wish to God I'd remembered that tag when I was spouting my piece. Why the hell didn't I ask to paint the laughter in the heart of man?"

"But the joy of creation . . ." broke in Moxon.

"Joy of fidlesticks! I was happier, far happier, when I was painting pot-boilers in Chiswick to buy sausages for dinner and a new blouse for Yvonne . . . and now Yvonne is making Oddenheimer happy, God's curse on him . . . and her. You know what made my name, that knocked the critics: that drew the Press—from Fry in the *Burlington* to my picture in the back of the *Daily Mail*—until I was the one subject of conversation at every suburban dinner-table from Potter's Bar to Ponder's End, 'Le Crime Passionel.' Man, do you suppose I could paint that if I hadn't *felt* it? The Ya-hoo talks glibly about the artist's joy in his work, as if the artist wasn't, in the first place, a man. Besides, what's the joy in doing what is no

effort to you: in which you *know* you cannot fail? You know Browning's poem about Sarto?

> "'At any rate 'tis easy, all of it! . . .
> I do what many dream of, all their lives,
> —dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
> And fail in doing . . .
> Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
> I, painting from myself and to myself,
> Know what to do, am unmoved by men's blame
> Or their praise either.'

"Aye—*painting from myself and to myself.* What is wealth to me, who have no use for money? Or the praise of men? Contemptible men who cannot understand and who, like silly sheep, but follow where one leads; and who to-morrow will find some fresh idol, 'with feet of clay a little gilt,' whose work they equally cannot comprehend.

"Oh, Lucrezia, Lucrezia, Lucrezia—we might have risen to Rafael, I and you! But I am alone—very lonely. Nevertheless *vogue la galère:* am I not the darling of the gods—in the gallery? I will paint what O'Donoghue very properly calls my beastly pictures, and I shall be more beastly than I have ever been before: the public, bless 'em, like it—and, by God, they shall have it."

"What miserable blighters you are!" growled O'Donoghue.

"Well, what about you?" asked Geoffrey Moxon, "has the Sphinx done any better for you?"

"Good God!" cried Michael O'Donoghue, "has she not! Haven't I given you a bloody fine dinner? Do you know what this feast is going to cost me? God knows, I don't —and I don't care: damn it, I don't care. Crœsus was a pauper compared to me. All I can say is the old girl has done me proud. Old Abraham dies: he had no children; and because he laughed at one of my gags at the old Proscenium, he goes and leaves me half a million. Fed up with my luck? You bet I'm not. I asked for money and I've got money: God damn it all, what else should I be after wanting?"

"You are altogether happy?" asked Peter Connington.

"Why on earth shouldn't I be?" replied O'Donoghue, staring blankly at Peter.

"She has given him money and she has killed his soul," said Connington, soberly.

"She has killed his soul," repeated Geoffrey Moxon.

"Oh, bah!" growled O'Donoghue, "talk sense."

He turned to Matthew Sumner.

"What the hell did you ask for?"

"I forget," said Matthew Sumner, very quietly.

Geoffrey Moxon stood up. He refilled his glass with brandy and drank it hurriedly.

"I'm going down again to that damned Sphinx and ask to have my gift taken back," he cried.

"I'll come too," muttered Connington.

"That's a damn sight more than I will then," grunted O'Donoghue; "I'm going back to the arms of my belovèd wife—my temporary wife, anyhow."

The dinner-party broke up. Moxon and Connington said good-bye to O'Donoghue and after some trouble Matthew Sumner found his hat.

"You coming too?" asked Geoffrey Moxon.

"Er . . . er . . . yes," murmured Matthew Sumner.

The night was starlit and very still. It was already late and the Embankment was deserted. An image of the Sphinx had some time before been blown from this place into the water by (as it was supposed) a revolutionary bomb. But bronze had been bought and no less a sculptor than Sir Hilary Pettigrew had been commissioned, and once more the Sphinx crouched upon her stone pedestal smiling at eternity and the bridge of Waterloo. Once more men were supplicant here before her: three out of four men, who, out of so many millions, had before come together to offer up their prayers to her divinity. It may have been that because this time they were (more or less) sober: or because they were more familiar with the goddess who had already granted their request: or simply

because they were so unhappy and so impatient as to be in no mood for ceremonial, that they did not, as they had done before, offer up any long or formal prayers at that shrine.

Geoffrey Moxon spoke first, standing with bowed head beneath the statue.

"Oh, Sphinx," he cried, "if it be possible, take back the gift that you have given me and let all be as it was before."

But there was only silence and the darkness of night. Presently Peter stood up and whispered:—

"Sphinx, take back your gift. Take back your gift and give me peace."

Still there was silence and darkness for a space while the two men gazed at the shadowy mass of the Sphinx above them. But at last a little light gradually spread over the face of the Sphinx—a faint phosphorescence at first, which slowly grew brighter, until the cruel smile of that beautiful face made fear grow greater in the hearts of those who stood there in the darkness beneath the image.

"There is a third here whose wish I granted," said the voice, "who has not yet spoken: does he seek another gift?"

"Yes," said the voice of Matthew Sumner, "I want to die."

For a moment it seemed that the smile on the face of the Sphinx deepened.

"Why?" asked the voice.

"Because I know now why you smile."

The other two men waited for the voice to speak again: but while they yet watched the light died out of the face of the Sphinx, and once again there was silence and the darkness of night, and when at last Geoffrey Moxon and Peter Connington turned sorrowfully away, Matthew Sumner was no longer with them.

CHAPTER XVII: MR. MATTHEW SUMNER AS REPORTED IN *THE TIMES*

SUMNER. On the 15th of November, at his residence, 71 Radgayne Gardens, London, W. MATTHEW MARTINDALE SUMNER, in his 37th year. Service at the Brookwood Crematorium, the 19th of November, at 2.30 p.m. Friends will please accept this, the only, intimation.

THE END